

DIRECTIONS

FOR THE

Profitable Reading

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES.

TOGETHER

With some OBSERVATIONS for
the Confirming their Divine Authority,
and Illustrating the Difficulties
thereof.

By WILLIAM LOWTH, B. D.
Prebendary of WINCHESTER.

The FOURTH EDITION.

L O N D O N :

Printed for STEPHEN AUSTEN, at the
Angel and *Bible* in *St Paul's Church-Yard*.
1735.

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THE PREFACE.

AFTER so many excellent commentaries and treatises upon the Holy Scriptures, it may seem needless to publish any thing further upon this argument, since it may be presum'd that nothing hath escap'd the search of so many learned and inquisitive persons, or can be pertinently added upon so common a subject.

I might, by way of apology for the following treatise, truly affirm that some particulars are handled in it, which have not been much insisted on by other writers: Some of the difficulties herein consider'd having been started, or at least reviv'd, but of late years. But I rather chuse to say, that I can't think discourses of this kind to be impertinent, as long as so many men of corrupt minds let loose both their tongues and pens against the holy Writings. These all Christians look upon as the oracles of God, and the sacred *Depositum* of divine truth: And whoever retains a due reverence for them, and makes them his study and meditation, will *continue grounded and settled in the faith, and not be mov'd from the hope of the Gospel* by the little cavils and exceptions of *Sceptics* and *Infidels*, which we may be bold to say proceed from their not knowing the Scriptures, and scorning to use the means whereby

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whereby they might be better inform'd.

The *seat of the scorers* is now-a-days look'd upon as the only *infallible chair*, and that temper which *Solomon* (a) so frequently brands with the worst of characters, as the most incapable of instruction, the most pernicious to him that hath it, and the most dangerous to the public, is thought by many amongst us to be the surest indication of wit and parts. But *whether such persons will bear, or whether they will forbear*, 'tis certainly the duty of those who are appointed to be *watchmen over the house of Israel to warn men to take heed, lest there be in any of them an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*, and despising his holy word, by which they must expect to be judg'd at the last day. It becomes those who are set for the

(a) Prov. iii. 34. xiii. 1. xiv. 6. xxix. 8.

defence and confirmation of the Gospel, to stand in the breach, and endeavour in their several stations to give a check to the overflowings of ungodliness, which threaten to break down all our banks, and whose principles, if they are pursu'd to their just consequences, cancel the authority of all laws both divine and human, and set men loose from the obligations of them: Licentiousness in opinion always making way for licentiousness in practice, which is the true reason why it finds so many abettors amongst us at this day. Upon which account 'tis the earnest wish and prayer of many good men, that God would put it into the heart of those who are in authority, to take care that the Toleration be confin'd within the bounds which the law hath prescrib'd to it; for 'tis great pity that liberty of conscience should become a shelter for men of no conscience, to vent such doctrines as are not only destructive of all reveal'd

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veal'd religion, but even of civil society itself.

It were well if the *teachers* of the *separate congregations* (I mean as many of them as have any regard for a rule of faith or discipline) would shew their zeal upon this occasion, in standing up for the maintenance of those common truths, which all that deserve the name of Christians, agree in. It would be great weakness in them to take the *author of the rights of the Christian Church*, and men of his stamp for their friends, because they discover a particular Spight and Hatred to the *Establish'd Church*; that indeed is the principal Object of Envy, (and we hope it always will be so to Men of ill Designs) and they are encourag'd in their Attempts against it, because they hope to find their own account in the unsettling of their foundations: But he must be blind that does not see, that the same arguments which are levell'd against the

present establishment, may be easily apply'd to other constitutions, some of which extend their claim to a *jus divinum* farther than the *Church of England* does.

The several parties that divide us, seem to agree in nothing so much as in expressing a great vehemence against *Popery*: Therefore it will not be amiss briefly to consider what advantages this licentiousness in opinion, so much in vogue, affords to that very cause, which it declaims against with so much fierceness.

First of all, nothing gives so plausible a colour to the *Popish* boasts of *unity* and *infallibility*, as to see men that pretend so much zeal against it, fall off from the common principles of Christianity, and discard all certainty in matters of religion.

In the next place, *superstition* and *profaneness* are not so far asunder as some may imagine: One extreme doth

doth usually produce another ; and when men have for some time bewilder'd themselves in the *maze* of *scepticism* and *infidelity*, and can find nothing whereon to fix, they will be ready to hearken to the *Popish* pleas for the *infallibility* of the *Church*, or to any thing else that may put a stop to their endless wanderings, and give rest to their weary souls.

Add to this, in the third place, that hearty *zeal* for religion, tho' it proceed upon false principles, will in the end get the better of a *luke-warm* and *indifferent* temper, which not only makes people suspect that the cause which is so coldly maintain'd wants truth to support it, but likewise that the abettors of it do not believe themselves.

To recover the spirit of piety, which is so visibly decay'd, and almost extinguish'd amongst us, I can't but earnestly recommend to all that are sincere lovers of truth, the careful reading of the holy Scriptures,

tures, which will afford to all that seriously peruse them, so many *internal arguments* of their divine authority, as cannot be withstood by an ingenuous mind, *viz.* such as are taken from their general scope and design, and the harmony of the several parts compar'd with each other; which proofs have this peculiar advantage, that they may be discern'd by an ordinary judgment without the help of human learning. 'Tis the principal design of the following papers, to consider the force of those arguments which arise from the very frame and contexture of the holy Writings. And I heartily pray to God, that the several treatises, which have of late been written upon this and such like subjects, the publishing whereof is so necessary in this age, may, by his blessing, become in some measure useful for the convincing gainfayers, and confirming well-dispos'd persons in their holy faith.

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DIREC-



DIRECTIONS


FOR THE

Profitable Reading

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES, &c.

The INTRODUCTION.

UR Divines have taken a great deal of pains, both by preaching and writing, to convince men of the obligations lying upon them to read and study the Holy Scriptures; and are as industrious to lay before
B their

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their people the great advantages they would receive by reading and meditating upon God's word, as the *Romanists* have been sollicitous to deter their Disciples from this employment, by representing to them the dangers they are likely to incur thereby. A great presumption, that the former are well assur'd that their doctrines will bear the test of the Scriptures; and the latter are conscious to themselves, that their tenets will not abide so severe a trial.

Thus far the argument in general has been sufficiently handled; but there is another particular relating to this subject, that seems not to have been much consider'd, and that is, *The giving rules for the more profitable reading of the Scriptures, and instructing persons, of ordinary understandings, what parts of Scripture are fittest for them to read, and best suited to their capacities.* This I take to be a consideration of great use and importance; the handling of which distinctly, would of itself contain a full answer

answer to all those popular objections which the *Popish* writers have made against the promiscuous reading of the *Bible*: As if we gave authority thereby to the meanest and most ignorant people, to judge of the sense of the abstrusest and most difficult parts of God's word; and that this private interpretation of Scripture was the last resort in all disputes, from which there lay no appeal either to the ancient fathers and councils, or to the authority of the present guides and governours of the Church. From whence they infer, that whatever Heresies or Schisms arise among us, from mens rash and unwarrantable interpretations of Scripture, we ought to bear all the blame, and may thank our selves if weak or ill-designing men turn those weapons against us, which we at first put into their hands.

But there would be no ground for these clamours, if the people were made sensible, that all parts of Scripture are not equally fitted for the ca-

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capacities of all men ; that as some contain *milk for babes in Christ*, so others afford *strong meat, which is proper only for those of a full and mature age* ; i. e. such as are arriv'd at a competent degree of knowledge in the mysteries of the Gospel ; and that to understand the Scriptures thoroughly, so as to be able by *sound doctrine* to establish the truth, and to *convince gainsayers*, is a work that requires as good parts, and as great industry, as any study whatsoever. And therefore as the Clergy ought particularly to dedicate themselves to this employment, and bend all their studies chiefly this way, that *their lips may preserve the knowledge* of those sacred oracles ; so 'tis the duty of the people *to seek the law at their mouths* : Not indeed to have such an implicit faith in what they say, that if they call evil good, and good evil, they should be bound to believe them ; but that persons of ordinary capacities, and such have not made the study of the Scriptures their Business, should have

have the same deference for the judgment of their teachers in difficulties relating to points of religion, as those that never studied Law or Physic, have for the judgment of Lawyers or Physicians in matters relating to their several professions. " Our Church is very unjustly reproach'd by the Papists. *to use the words of a learned writer (a),* as if it left every one at liberty to interpret Scripture as they pleas'd ; for we embrace the *antient Creeds* as the summary comprehension of the articles of our faith ; and we think no man ought to follow his fancy, in rejecting any doctrines which have been universally receiv'd in the Christian Church from the times of the Apostles : And in difficult cases we require all men to call in the assistance of their spiritual guides and governors, whom God has appointed for the better instructing and governing private persons."

(a) *Answer to the royal papers.*

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This I take to be the true state of the case, concerning the *peoples right to read and expound the Scriptures*: And it has this fair presumption on it's side, that 'tis equally plac'd between two extreams, *viz.* that of locking up the Scriptures, and taking the *key of knowledge* out of the peoples hands; and the other of making every ignorant mechanic a judge of the sense and meaning of the most abstruse parts of God's word. Both which opinions seem to render the pastoral office useless and insignificant: For there is no use of teachers where no body is oblig'd to learn (and there is little encouragement for knowledge in that church, which makes an implicit faith in her belief sufficient to salvation): And where every body sets up for that employment, what need is there of a particular order of men set apart for that purpose?

But lest any of the learned Laity should suspect that I intend to confine the knowledge of the Scriptures to the Clergy, I shall not scruple to declare,
that

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. 7

that I heartily join in that generous wish of *Moses* (a), *would God all the Lord's people were Prophets* : And where any of them by the advantage of a learned education, and proportionable industry hath arrived to a good degree of critical skill in the Scriptures, I shall have as great regard to his judgment in those matters, as to any church-man's whatsoever, neither of them being to be rely'd upon any further than they can shew that they have reason, the analogy of faith, and the phraseology of Scripture on their side.

(a) Numb. xi. 39.



C H A P.

C H A P. I.

That the several parts of Scripture were accommodated to mens use, with a regard to their several capacities; which appears by the different subjects therein treated of, and the different styles wherein the several parts of Scripture were written.

THOSE that please themselves in raising cavils against the Holy Scriptures, do it chiefly upon this ground; That every one would have them writ just in that style and method, which is most suitable to his own genius. Men that are us'd to range their thoughts in exact method and order, expect the *Bible* should be writ like a regular system of philosophy, and are offended with the sundry repetitions they meet with there, and the want of exact order and coherence. They that don't care to be
at

at any pains or trouble in searching the Scriptures, would have all divine truths laid down there in such plain terms, that he *that runs may read them*. The men of politeness and elegance decry the holy books for want of a fine thread of subtle reasoning, recommended with the ornaments of wit and eloquence: So the *Greeks* sought after *wisdom* in the preaching and writings of the Apostles.

Thus every sceptic expects that God's spirit should comply with his fancy and humour: But the divine wisdom, instead of gratifying each particular person in his unreasonable demands, has rather consulted the general profit and advantage of all together, and in the several parts of holy Writ *has become all things to all men*. The holy Spirit has condescended to the weaker and more ignorant part of mankind, in that plain and unaffected style wherewith all necessary truths are deliver'd, and often inculcated in several parts of

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Scrip-

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Scripture, particularly in the *Gospels*, the greatest part of the *Epistles*, and the *practical* books of the *old Testament*. The *parables* of our Saviour, the *typical* representations of the *Jewish æconomy*, and the *mystical* sense of the *prophetical* writings, will find employment sufficient, both to humble the thoughts and exercise the talents of the most subtle and inquisitive men. *Lastly*, That lofty and majestic eloquence, which is so conspicuous in several parts of holy Writ, particularly in the writings of the Prophets, is able to recommend itself to the greatest masters of eloquence, and withal very proper to inspire the minds of attentive readers with noble ideas of the divine wisdom and providence, suitable to the greatness of those sublime truths which are there discovered to us.

If the whole body of the Scriptures had been written with that accuracy of phrase and method, which chiefly recommends human writings to the perusal of the curious, it would
not

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. II

not have answer'd one great intent and design of it, which was to *give wisdom to the simple* and unlearned. If there had been nothing of abstruseness in the things there treated of, or in the manner of expressing them, it would hardly have detain'd the thoughts of the curious, or rewarded the industry of the diligent. But God has so wisely temper'd those different qualities together, that he who has much understanding will find employment for his best thoughts in searching out the *deep things of God's* word; and he that has but little, may learn enough from thence to make him wise unto salvation.

The several parts of Scripture being thus adapted to mens several capacities, it plainly follows from hence, that he who would read the Scriptures with profit, must begin with the plainest books first, and make them the chief subject of his reading and meditation, and not meddle with the obscure and difficult parts of holy Writ, 'till he is very well vers'd in the former.

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This is the natural method and order to be used in all sorts of learning, to begin with the plainest things first; and therefore they that are *unskilful in the word of righteousness, and have need of milk, and not of strong meat*, should not be too forward to busy their heads with the more abstruse parts of God's word, but should content themselves with studying the plainest books first, 'till they become perfect masters of those writings, which as they are easiest to be understood, so they afford the greatest matter of edification to all attentive readers. Such are, as I observ'd before, the greatest part of the *new Testament*, and *Psalms*, and practical books of the *old*. And yet we find it a common fault, and that which the weakest and most injudicious people are usually most guilty of, *viz.* that they neglect the reading those books of Holy Scripture which deliver with great plainness and perspicuity, all things necessary for a Christian to know and practise, and
perplex

perplex themselves with the more abstruse parts of the *Bible*, of such as are the prophecies of *Daniel*, *Ezekiel*, and the *Revelation*, which can afford but small edification to unlearned and ignorant readers, but, by being misunderstood, or misapplied, may lead them into great and dangerous mistakes. Accordingly experience has given us many examples of unlearned and unsettled heads, who by this means have lost not only the true sense of religion, but even their common sense and judgment as to other matters, have fancied themselves design'd by God to be his instruments in fulfilling of prophecies, and thought themselves dispensed with from observing the ordinary duties of fearing God and keeping his commandments, because they were made choice of to serve him in the extraordinary way of overturning kingdoms and unsettling governments.

I doubt not but wise and sober men may make a very good use of the more abstruse parts of God's word,

as

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as I shall further shew in the sequel of this discourse. God gives some men a peculiar insight into deep and mysterious truths, and furnishes them with particular talents for that purpose : *He opens the eyes of their understanding, that they may see the wondrous things of his word*, as a reward of their laborious search and pious thirst after divine knowledge : As he did not think fit to (a) *hide from Abraham the thing he was about to do*. So that to say, as some have done, that the *reading of the Revelation either finds men mad, or makes them so*, is, in the first place, a very rash and bold censure of a book, which all Christians acknowledge to have been writ by divine inspiration ; and then a very odd comment upon the very frontispiece and introduction to it, which says, (b) *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this Prophecy*. But what I insist upon at present, is this, that

(a) Gen. xviii. 17. (b) Rev. i. 3.

when

when persons of weak and unsettled minds pass over the plain books of Scripture, and will be too prying into the obscure parts of it, it looks like the presumption of *Uzzab*, and the men of *Bethshemesb*, (a) who approached the ark with too much curiosity; and 'tis commonly attended with as bad a consequence; it makes a *breach* both into their understandings and their morals. St *Paul* indeed says, (b) that *all Scripture is profitable*; but he does not say 'tis so to all men, but particularly to *the man of God*, to the teachers of the Church, as the context plainly restrains the words. The primitive Church cannot be accus'd of encouraging ignorance in the people, and yet *Origen* (c) informs us, that there was a distinction made then be-

(a) 1 Sam. vi. 19. 2 Sam. vi. 7. (b) 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

(c) L. 7. c. Cels. p. 356. Οὐκ ἐν ἀνακεχωρηκόσι καὶ ἀναγινωσκομένοις ὑπὸ ὀλίγων μόνον καὶ φορομαθῶν, ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς δημωδετέροις γεσεῖται, ὅτι τὰ ἀόρατα τοῦ Θεοῦ, &c. Rom. i. 20.

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tween those books of Scripture which lay open to every body's use, and such as were read only by persons of better understandings: A distinction, which if it had been observ'd in these latter ages, would have not a little contributed to the peace of the Church.

I am sensible some may think it too rigorous an injunction, absolutely to forbid ordinary persons the reading the more abstruse parts of the *Bible*, and 'tis likely that several will not stick to call it a *Popish* doctrine, and design'd for the introducing implicit faith, and blind obedience. Therefore to prevent such a misconstruction, I shall, in the pursuit of this argument, not only give directions for the profitable reading of the plainer parts of the Holy Scriptures, but likewise consider what use persons of common capacities may, and ought to make of the obscurer books of the *Bible*. The handling which subject will have this benefit in it, that it may prevent mens making an
ill

ill use of those sacred writings, and thereby raising an evil report against them.

C H A P. II.

Two prejudices which hinder many from the careful reading and study of the Scriptures. The first of them, relating to the style and method of those holy writings, consider'd.

NOT only the enemies of our holy religion have rais'd several objections against the style of the Scriptures, but some well-dispos'd persons have neglected to read them, because they thought they could be better edified and instructed by the practical writings of private divines, where they find their duty laid down in an easier method, and with greater plainness and perspicuity of expression.

Before

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Before I give a particular answer to this difficulty, I shall premise in general, that supposing the utmost of this objection were true, yet we ought to come to God with the same simplicity of mind, and resignation of judgment, that every learner brings with him, when he comes to his master; and 'tis fit we should pay that deference to his wisdom, as entirely to submit to what method of instruction he thinks most proper for us. And we may reasonably believe, that God will particularly bless the endeavours of those that thus come to him in his own way, and acquiesce in those means of instruction which he himself has ordain'd: Besides, there is a majesty and authority in the word of God, which is not to be found in human writings; and when we hear God speak unto us, some times by his Prophets, sometimes by his Apostles, sometimes by his Son, and sometimes by himself, this must needs affect us with extraordinary reverence; and we
can't

can't chuse but give the same earnest heed to the things thus spoken to us, as we would to a voice that came from heaven.

Having premised thus much in general, I proceed to give a more particular answer to the objection, and shall endeavour to vindicate the style and method of writing us'd by the sacred pen-men, by shewing, that it affords several arguments to prove the truth and certainty of the things contain'd in the Scriptures; as will appear from these four considerations,

1. *As to the historical books of Scripture, the principal matters are there recorded with such circumstances, that they mutually confirm and support each other.*

2. *If we take a general view of the whole body of Scripture, we find one and the same design carry'd on by several writers, who could not be suppos'd to combine together, since the greatest part of them liv'd at a considerable distance of time from each other.*

3. *We*

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3. *We find the mystery of our redemption, the principal subject of the Holy Scriptures, open'd there by degrees, according to the capacities and exigences of several ages.*

4. *That plain and inartificial manner of writing which the holy penmen use, affords weighty arguments to prove their truth and sincerity.*

1. As to the historical books of Scripture, the principal matters are there recorded with such circumstances, that they do mutually confirm and support each other. To make this out by instancing in a few particulars. The history of *Abraham* and his posterity, the preferring *Ishaac* before *Ishmael*, and *Jacob* before *Esau*, their sojourning in *Egypt*, and deliverance from thence, their settling in the land of *Canaan*, and the account which we have of their several idolatries and captivities afterwards. These passages of the sacred story contain in them a signal accomplishment of the promises made to *Abraham*
ham

ham of the prophecies uttered by *Jacob* upon his death-bed, and the predictions of *Moses* before he left the world. We are further to consider, that these historical accounts are mixt and interwoven with several particulars relating to the affairs of the neighbouring nations, *viz.* the *Ishmaelites*, *Egyptians*, *Edomites*, &c. which we can't suspect that the sacred writers would forge; for that would have been to expose themselves to the scorn and reproach of their profess'd enemies.

The same writings do likewise inform us, that the settlement of the *Jews* in the land of *Canaan*, their form of government, their customs and manner of life, were nothing else but the putting the laws of *Moses* in execution; many of which being burthensome and chargeable, we can't suppose a whole nation would have voluntarily submitted to them, without pregnant proofs of their divine authority.

In

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In like manner, if we view the history of the Gospels, we may observe that it contains several predictions, concerning the destruction of *Jerusalem*, the rejecting of the *Jews*, the calling of the *Gentiles*, the speedy propagation of the christian religion; all which, and several other prophecies there recorded, are interwoven with the thread of the Gospel history, and deliver'd with such circumstances as plainly shew those histories to be writ several years before the events so foretold did come to pass.

These considerations afford a full answer to those that find fault with the Scripture as confused and immethodical: To whom it is a sufficient reply to say, that the historical, prophetical, and doctrinal parts of the *Bible* are so mixt and interwoven together, because they mutually add strength to each other: The histories shew the completion of the prophecies; the prophecies confirm the truth of the histories; and both of them prove the divine authority of the doctrine.

2. *The*

2. *The harmony and agreement between the several writers of the old and new Testament, tho' the greatest part of them liv'd at a considerable distance from each other, is a convincing proof of their truth and sincerity.*

Some that take upon them to prescribe to God Almighty, how he should reveal his will to the world, would have all the prophecies concerning our Saviour's birth, life, sufferings, and exaltation, compriz'd under one collection ; and have all saving truth reduc'd into one system. But those correctors of the *Bible* don't consider, that by this means we should lose one very considerable argument, for the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures, which is taken from the harmony and agreement of the inspir'd writers, tho' they liv'd in distant ages, and writ upon different occasions. The writings of the *old* and *new Testament*, like two faithful witnesses, verifie

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verifie and confirm each other's testimony: What the *old Testament* promises, the *new* performs: What the one foretells, the other represents the accomplishment of. Several books of the Scripture Canon were writ at a great distance of time from each other, and consequently by persons that could hold no correspondence together, some of them living near two thousand years asunder. This proves that it was impossible they could conspire to put a cheat upon the world; and from thence it follows, that the religion contain'd in the *old* and *new Testament*, could not be a piece of human contrivance, since the several authors of those books could never combine together in carrying on such a design.

The Apostles were so well satisfy'd, that what they taught was agreeable to the doctrine of the *old Testament*, that they still appeal to those writings upon all occasions; and tho' they testify'd nothing but *what they had seen and heard*, yet they thought it added great weight to their testimony,

mony, that they (a) *said no other things than what Moses and the Prophets did say should come.* The miraculous gifts they were endow'd with, were an undeniable proof of their divine commission: But yet St *Peter* calls the predictions contain'd in the *old Testament*, (b) *A more sure word of prophecy*; as if it were in some respects a more convincing proof of the truth of Christianity, than miracles themselves. Both the miracles, and the persons who wrought them, were necessarily confin'd to one particular time and place; whereas the fundry prophecies concerning the *Messias* and his kingdom, which are scatter'd up and down throughout the *old Testament*, are the united suffrage of several ages of the world, and contain the concurring testimony of men, who could never join in carrying on one common interest or design, and agreed in nothing but in uttering those divine truths, which they all

(a) Acts xxvi. 22.

(b) 2 Pet. i. 19.

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receiv'd from one and the same spirit. This consideration leads me to the

3. Particular, wherein the wisdom of God appears in the manner of his inditing the Holy Scriptures, *viz. In the different steps and degrees whereby the mystery of our redemption is unfolded by the sacred writers.*

This indeed is but a continuance of the former argument, and a fuller discovery of the harmony and agreement of the several writers of the *old Testament*: In that they all pursue one and the same great design, which is to foretel and describe the coming of the *Messias*, the foundation of all divine revelation, and preserve in mens minds an earnest expectation of his appearance.

And here I shall briefly consider, the different steps whereby this great truth was discover'd to the Patriarchs *before the law*, to *Moses in the ordinances*

nances of the law, and to the Prophets afterwards.

Immediately upon the fall of our first parents, God, who *in the midst of judgment remembers mercy*, comforted them under their desponding apprehensions, by giving them the promise of *the seed of the woman, which should break the serpent's head*, by whom they had been betray'd into sin and misery.

To *Abraham* God afterward more fully reveal'd, that the *promised seed*, or *Messias*, should arise out of his family, (a) *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*. To *Jacob* it was shew'd, that he should spring from the tribe of *Judah*, and come into the world before the *Scepter* should depart from that tribe.

Under *Moses*, the deliverance of the *Israelites* from the *Egyptian* bondage, and all the rites and sacrifices ordain'd by his ministry, had a particular relation to that deliverance which

(a) Gen. xxii. 18.

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the *Messias* should obtain for us from sin and death, and were so many *figures of him that was to come.*

The Prophets that succeeded, plac'd this truth still in a clearer light, by the many illustrious predictions which they gave concerning Christ's birth, family, sufferings, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom. And by their pointing out the several circumstances relating to the times of the *Messias*, and withal exhorting men not to rest in the bare letter of the law, but to fulfil the righteousness chiefly intended by it, they prepar'd mens minds to expect a new and better state of things, a new covenant, *establisb'd upon better promises.*

And when the Prophets had thus prepar'd the way for the reception of the *Messias*, the gift of prophecy in a great measure ceas'd (a), neither was there any public succession of Prophets for the space of four hundred

(a) See 1 Macc. iv. 46. ix. 27. xiv. 41. Ecclus. xxxvi. 15.

years together, before the coming of Christ, on purpose to raise in mens minds a more earnest expectation of those happy days, wherein God had promis'd to *pour out his spirit upon all flesh*, and to afford the world greater measures of grace and knowledge, than ever it enjoy'd before.

Having thus taken a brief view of the different steps by which God vouchsafed to make known this fundamental truth by the holy writers, we may leave it to any considering man to determine, which of the two ways is most serviceable to the main end and design of prophecy, which was to prepare the way of the *Messias*; either for God summarily to have fore-shewn all the particulars relating to the times of the *Messias* in one single prophecy, which is some mens unreasonable demand, or else to have us'd that method he has already pitch'd upon, whereby the coming of Christ is not only in express words foretold by all the Prophets, but likewise mystically imply'd in all the

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rites and ceremonies of the *Jewish* worship, and typically represented in the lives and actions of the most famous men of foregoing times. 'Tis evident that this latter way introduces Christ, into the world with a great deal more of previous solemnity, whilst it makes all the eminent men of former ages so many harbingers of his coming, and raises in mens minds a just veneration for the gospel state, as the master-piece of the divine providence, that point wherein all the lines of *God's manifold wisdom* do meet as in their center; all which is a plain demonstration, that Christ was *ordain'd by God before the beginning of the world*, (a) tho' in his wise disposal he did not appear 'till the latter ages of it.

4. *That plain and inartificial style which the holy writers make use of, affords weighty arguments to prove their truth and sincerity.*

(a) Tit. i. 2. 1 Pet. i. 20.

In

In the first place it would be absurd to expect, that that part of Holy Scripture, which consists in giving laws to mankind, should be fine and persuasive: "Whereas the language
 " of law should be short and plain,
 " and full of authority, as an eminent divine has observ'd (a): Thus
 " we find it is among men, and
 " surely 'tis much fitter for God to
 " speak thus to men, than for men
 " to one another." (b)

Likewise in histories and narratives, the plainness and simplicity of the style is a great proof of the truth and sincerity of the writer. Now the plainness of the Scripture history is truly admirable; for 'tis join'd with such a native grandeur and authority as commands an assent, and works more powerfully upon the minds of men, than all the art in the world. Without question *Moses* was able to

(a) *Arch-Bp. Tillotf. 2d. Serm. on Mat. xi. 2.*

(b) *Sunt certa Legum verba, & quo plus auctoritatis habeant, paulo antiquiora. Cic. l. 2. de Legibus.*

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describe the passions to the life, and understood the beauties of history, as well as the politeſt writers among the *Greeks* or *Romans*. To be convinc'd of this, we need only read his deſcription of *Abraham's* going to ſacrifice his ſon; and the ſeveral paſſions *Joſeph* and his brethren were affected with, at their interview in *Egypt*. Yet we may obſerve, that that part of his history, which himſelf was an eye-witneſs of, is written after the plaineſt and moſt inartificial manner that can be imagin'd, in the nature of a journal, as if he had only ſet down an account of every day's tranſactions juſt after they happen'd. Some perhaps may cenſure this as a careleſs and immethodical way of writing; but it has this great advantage in it, that the very form and ſtyle of the work ſhews that it has been tranſmitted down to us juſt as *Moses* wrote it.

To give his readers an undeniable proof of his impartiality, this holy writer neither conceals his own infirmities,

mities, nor any of those particulars which might reflect upon the honour of his nation, tribe, or family. He records the curse which *Jacob* pronounced at his death upon his own tribe of *Levi*: He vilifies his own birth, by acquainting us that he was born of such a marriage as his own law condemns for incestuous: He represents his nation as a stubborn, untractable people, neither to be wrought upon by God's mercies, nor his judgments.

The like air of sincerity runs thro' the whole gospel history, where the Evangelists publish without any reserve, their own and their brethrens infirmities, their slowness of understanding, their incredulity, their little contentions among themselves; they conceal not that one of Christ's disciples betray'd his master, another deny'd him, and all fled from him.

If there be any such thing as *internal marks* of the truth of any history, or such arguments as are taken from the very texture and composure of

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the work itself, as all critics acknowledge that there are, we must confess that the Scripture history has more of self-evident truth, than any history in the world.

We may further take notice upon this head, that the practical books of Scripture are written in a plain and simple style, yet without being flat and insipid : They deliver the weightiest truths in a grave and serious manner, without an affected fineness, or studied periods : They convey into our minds worthy ideas of God, and just notions of our duty, without descending to useless subtilties, or soaring too much above the apprehensions of the vulgar, which made the writings of the Philosophers of no use to far the greater part of mankind. *The words of the Lord are pure words*, as the *Psalmist* speaks, *i. e.* they have none of that dross or alloy of error or passion, which insensibly slides into all human compositions : They deliver divine truths pure and unmixed, tho' in a popular
and

and inartificial manner of expression, and in such a way as is worthy of the majesty of God, and yet condescends to the weakness of the generality of men.

Some indeed have objected against this plainness of the sacred writers, as if it had betray'd them into an unbecoming extream, and made them set down such particulars as were not worthy to be taken notice of by a grave and wise historian. But such persons would do well to consider, that when they pass this censure upon particular passages in holy Writ, they do it by a very imperfect light: for they are not acquainted with all the circumstances and consequents of those particulars, which are but slightly mention'd in Scripture: And they likewise judge of the small importance of these matters by such notions and opinions as prevail in their own times, without comparing them with the sentiments of the age wherein those things were trans-

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acted, or inquiring whether the sacred writers might not have some further prospect in recording such matters, than they are aware of. And this, learned men have made out, as to several passages which seem light and inconsiderable, and have fully vindicated the credit and authority of the sacred writers against the cavils of this objection (a). It was likewise an opinion receiv'd among the ancient writers, (See *Justin Martyr, Dial. c. Tryph. p. 364, 371.*) that many of the actions of the patriarchs were *typical*, or representations of the future state of the Church; which notion is very much confirm'd by that passage in *St Paul, Gal. iv. 30.* where he supposes *Abraham's casting out the bond-woman and her Son* out of his house, to presignify the ejecting of the *Jews* out of the Church of Christ.

(a) See particularly *Dr Allix's Reflexions*, Vol. I. Part I. Chap. 13, 15, 16. And Part II. Chap. 20.

These

These objectors would shew much more candor and impartiality, if they would not pass so hasty a censure upon such passages of holy Writ, as seem to them liable to exception; but rather say as the Philosopher did when he gave his opinion concerning the writings of *Heraclitus*, *What I understand is excellent; and, I presume, what I understand not, to be so too.*



C H A P. III.

An answer to another popular objection against the reading of the Scriptures, taken from their obscurity; and some rules laid down to remedy this difficulty.

ANOTHER difficulty which discourages many from reading the Scriptures, is the obscurity of several phrases and passages therein contain'd, which hinders them from being so instructive as books originally written in the vulgar language are; and likewise makes them liable to be perverted and misunderstood; the consequences of which are so dangerous, that some think this alone a sufficient reason why persons of ordinary capacities should not be too curious in searching the Scriptures.

In

In answer to this objection, I shall consider, in the first place, how far it may be charg'd upon the Scripture; or, in what sense the Scriptures may be esteem'd obscure.

2. I shall assign the immediate causes of that obscurity.

3. I shall offer some rules, which may help to clear up the difficulties we meet with in the holy writings.

First, I shall consider, how far this objection may be charg'd upon the Scriptures.

Altho' we acknowledge there are *some things* in Scripture *hard to be understood*, yet still we affirm, that all things necessary for us to believe and practise, in order to our salvation, are deliver'd there with the greatest clearness and perspicuity. Some of the prophets indeed describe their writings as a book *seal'd up* (a), and

(a) Isai. xxix. 12. Dan. viii. 26. xii. 4. Rev. x. 4.

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not to be open'd or understood by every body. But the generality of the holy writers affect great plainness of expression, and make use of a popular style, on purpose to condescend to vulgar capacities. St Paul tells the *Corinthians* (a), That he us'd great plainness of speech, that they might all with open face, without any veil or covering, behold, as in a glass, the glories of the Lord. The design of all writing is to convey our thoughts intelligibly to others; and it would be a great reflexion upon God's wisdom, if a book written by his direction, and for the instruction of mankind, should fall short of that end which human composures do generally attain to. The disputes that have risen concerning the sense of Scripture, is not always owing to the obscurity of the Scripture expressions; as may appear in several instances: That the *death of Christ is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins*, is

(a) 2 Cor. iii. 12, 18.

as fully asserted as words can do it : In like manner, there are no plainer texts in the *Bible* than those that forbid the *worship of images*, or the *performing the public service in an unknown language* : The same may be affirmed of the command of *receiving the cup in the Lord's supper* : And yet we see the contrary opinions and practices are maintained with as much stiffness and obstinacy, as if the authority of the Scriptures were clear on the other side. But then 'tis to be confess'd, that there are several doubts relating to particular texts, which arise either from the darkness and ambiguity of the phrases and expressions therein made use of, or from the obscurity of the matters which are there handled. These two are the immediate causes of the obscurity we meet with in the holy Scripture, which I propos'd to consider in the second place.

As to the former of these, *viz.* the obscurity of Scripture phrases, we are to consider that we have but a
very

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very imperfect knowledge of the language in which the old *Old Testament* was written ; and it can't be expected but that in a book writ so many years ago, there must be allusions to customs and transactions, the memory of which is worn out by length of time ; and several expressions made use of which are different from the genius and modes of speaking us'd in modern languages. For example, we have but few remains of antiquity to inform us what were the idolatrous customs of those early ages, and yet 'tis very probable that they gave occasion to some precepts of the ceremonial law, one great design of which was to preserve the *Jews* from falling into the idolatries of their neighbouring nations. In like manner, if we were exactly acquainted with the method which the ancient *Jews* us'd in computing their time, and the manner of their intercalations, it would, no doubt, very much contribute to clear several difficulties in Scripture chronology.

In

In the next place, the obscurity which we find in Scripture, arises from the things themselves therein treated of, several of which are too much above our narrow capacities fully to comprehend and explain: Such as are, the nature and attributes of God, his counsels and providence, the nature of our own souls, and the methods God hath made use of to recover them out of misery. It is, I think, acknowledg'd on all sides, that our capacities are but finite, which very term implies that our understanding has bounds set to it which it cannot pass: And since it is thus limited, if any thing be above it's reach, certainly the infinite perfections of almighty God, his ways and judgments have the greatest reason to be esteem'd so. Notwithstanding this, we are to take notice, that there may be, and certainly are, several plain propositions laid down in Scripture concerning these matters, tho' the things themselves, in their utmost extent, are above our understanding:

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standing: For instance, these propositions, *God is a Spirit*, or *is eternal*, are very plain and intelligible propositions, tho' we can't precisely define what a *Spirit* is, nor have any adequate notion of *Eternity*. In like manner, the Scripture does plainly affirm, that the divine nature is communicated from the *Father*, to the *Son* and *Holy Ghost*, altho' the manner of this communication be above our comprehension.

The obscurity which is generally spread over the writings of the prophets, is partly owing to the fore-mention'd causes, but is chiefly to be ascrib'd to providential reasons. If men could see clearly to the end of prophecies, and the manner how they were to be accomplish'd, they could not be brought to pass in a way either suitable to the holiness of God, or to the free-will of men, who are the great instruments of providence. The measures whereby God governs the world, make it requisite that men should not be able
to

to fathom his counsels, or know what work he has in hand : And 'tis absolutely necessary, that the methods of providence should be secret and conceal'd from us, to make them righteous and holy in themselves. So that what St *Paul* speaks to the *Jews*, concerning the accomplishment of those prophecies, which relate to the sufferings of the *Messias*, may be fitly apply'd to the fulfilling of prophecies in general (*a*), *because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.* But having elsewhere (*b*) discours'd at large concerning the providential reasons of the obscurity of the prophetic writings, I shall not here repeat what has been there spoken upon this head, and shall only add, that several reasons may be assign'd, why God should suffer some things in other parts of the holy Scriptures to be obscure.

(*a*) Acts xiii. 27.

(*b*) *Answ. to Five Letters*, Ch. 4.

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We are apt to despise what is plain and easy; upon which account, as the obscurity of some passages in Scripture is very proper to humble us before God, and teach us to adore those depths of the divine wisdom, which are contained in his word; so it is a means to excite our industry in searching out divine truth, and make us receive it with joy, when we have discover'd it (a). Our value for Scripture knowledge is encreas'd by the labour we took in finding it out; and our pains are abundantly recompens'd in the satisfaction which devout souls feel in the discoveries which God makes to them of himself. *They rejoyce in Spirit*, as our Saviour did upon the like occasion (b), and heartily *thank their heavenly Father for revealing that truth which he hides from the worldly-wise, to babes in Christ*, to those that

(a) *Sunt in scripturis S. profunda mysteria, quæ ad hoc absconduntur ne vilescant, ad hoc quærantur, ut exerceant.* August.

(b) Luke x. 21.

hunger and thirst after righteousness, and esteem the knowledge and love of God to be the chiefest part of human felicity.

I proceed, in the third place, to offer some general rules or directions, for clearing up the difficulties we meet with in Scriptures, and enabling us to read them with profit.

And in the first place I premise that 'tis absolutely necessary, that persons of ordinary education and capacities should depend upon the judgment of those teachers and instructors which God has plac'd over them, for the sense of difficult places of Scripture.

I readily acknowledge that there are some things so plainly deliver'd in Scripture, that no authority in the world can oblige men to doubt of their sense and meaning: Such is the sense of the second commandment, in direct terms forbidding the *worship of images*; and the command of our Saviour's expressly requiring all his disciples to partake of the *cup in*
the

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the Lord's supper. In these and such like cases, a person of common sense may safely keep close to the letter of the Scripture, tho' it be in opposition to the greatest consent of human authority. But what I here lay down, I would have understood with relation to a great many other controversies of religion, where persons of mean capacities are not able to judge of the force of a good argument, much less of the issue of a long dispute. And in these cases, I affirm their best security is to rely upon the judgment of those teachers, whom providence and their superiors have plac'd over them.

I shall not scruple to affirm, that there never was a greater piece of enthusiasm broach'd than this, that men may be sufficiently qualify'd for expositors of Scripture, without the help of study or human learning. 'Tis granted, that the Scriptures are plain in necessary things; but no book can be so plain, but that 'tis requisite for the perfect understanding of it,

it, that men should be acquainted with the idioms and proprieties of the original language, and the customs and notions which were generally receiv'd at the time when it was writ.

This is a difficulty common to Scripture, with all other books of antiquity : And they that in either case cannot inform themselves in these matters, which require some skill in ancient learning, must rely upon the judgment of those who have made those studies their business and profession. The meanest artificer thinks his trade and mystery not to be learned without serving an apprenticeship ; and yet many of those very persons fancy the profession of Divinity requires neither parts nor industry. This is a piece of presumption as old as the times of St Jerom (a), (tho' very

(a) *Sola scripturarum ars est, quam sibi omnes passim vendicant — Hanc garrula anus, hanc delirus senex, hanc sophista verbosus, hanc universi præsumunt, lacerant, docent antequam discant.* Hieron. Epist. ad Paulin. init. Tom. 3.

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much encreas'd by the licentiousness of latter times) who complains, " That the sense of the Scriptures " was the only piece of knowledge, " which every one thought him- " self a competent judge of, with- " out pains or study, without the " help of a guide or instructor."

St Peter tells us, (a) that *unlearned and unstable men did wrest the Scriptures* in his time, without any regard to the authority of the Apostles themselves, who were infallible interpreters of the holy oracles : But he adds, that *it was their own destruction*, and that justly ; for since God has appointed pastors in his Church to be guides to the people, if they, thro' pride or obstinacy, will despise instruction, 'tis their own fault *if they fall into the ditch*.

And this, by the way, may convince men of ordinary capacities, that 'tis much safer for them to err with the establish'd Church, than

(a) 2 Pet. iii. 16.

to err by being of a party against it: So that the scruples of our separatists are still on the *wrong side*, as a great man (a), who was far from being their enemy, hath justly stated their case, all of them against government and obedience, none of them in favour of two things so necessary to the preservation of all society. When men err with their governors, they have this favourable plea on their side, that they were led into error by those whom God had plac'd over them: But when men forsake the truth and the Church together, both these faults will be laid to their charge; First, leaving the truth, and embracing error; and then causelessly breaking the peace of the Church. It were well, if this matter were seriously consider'd by many now-a-days, who are apt to think their souls are then in the

(a) *Archbishop Tillotson's Sermon upon Acts xxiv.*
16. p. 384. *Edit. Fol.*

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safest condition, when they are at the greatest distance from the establish'd Church.

Having premised this necessary caution concerning the submission and deference due to the judgment of our spiritual guides in expounding Scripture; I proceed to lay down more particular rules and directions for the right understanding and interpretation of it. And the first rule I shall offer is this, *That we would begin with reading the plainest books first.* This advice I have recommended already (a), and shall only add, to what has been said there upon this head, that I take the Gospels to be one of the most proper books for any person to begin with, that designs to make a good progress in Scripture knowledge. For these are plain and easy, and generally intelligible to the meanest capacity, and yet must

(a) Chap. i.

needs afford extraordinary edification to those that will give attendance to the reading of them. For here we have him speak unto us, who came down from heaven on purpose that he might instruct us, and teach us the way of God more perfectly: We have him speak unto us, *who spake as never man did.* And because example is of greater force than bare precept, we have his doctrine set forth to the life, in his most glorious example, and holy conversation.

Next to the Gospels, I would recommend the reading of the book of *Psalms*, as being the great treasure of spiritual devotion, and very proper to raise in our souls devout affections of faith and hope toward God, of love and thankfulness to him, of reverence to his name and word, and submission to his will and providence.

I shall conclude this particular with the excellent directions St *Jerom*

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gives to *Læta*, in his epistle to her concerning the education of her daughter, where speaking of this subject, he advises her *first to teach her daughter the Psalms, and let her, saith he, be entertain'd with these holy songs: Then let her be instructed in the common duties of life by the Proverbs of Solomon. Let her learn from Ecclesiastes, to dispise worldly things; transcribe from Job the practice of patience and virtue: Let her pass then to the Gospels, and never let them be out of her hands; and then imbibe with all the faculties of her mind the Acts and Epistles. When she has enrich'd the store-house of her breast with those treasures, let her learn the books of Moses, Joshua and Judges, the books of Kings and Chronicles, the volumes of Ezra and Esther; and lastly the Canticles.*

2. The second rule I would offer to this purpose, is, *To have a regard to the analogy of faith, in the reading*

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. 55
*reading and interpreting the Scrip-
tures.*

This is the Apostle's rule, *Rom. xii. 6. If any man prophecie* (which word often signifies explaining and interpreting Scripture in the writings of the *new Testament*) *let him prophecie according to the analogy or proportion of faith.* This rule equally holds with respect to those that instruct, as well as those that learn. It implies having always a regard to the fundamental principles both of faith and practice, and never interpreting any particular text of Scripture in such a sense as to make it contradict any of those fundamental points of doctrine or good manners, which we find often repeated in the Holy Scriptures, and every where the greatest stress laid upon them.

To this purpose St *John* (a) lays down this rule for *trying the spirits,*

(a) 1 John iv. 1, 2.

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i. e. those doctrines which were taught by men pretending to the spirit: *Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God.* This was a fundamental principle of Christianity, by which other doctrines were to be try'd. St Paul lays down a rule to the same purpose, (a) *If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, i. e. if any man teach such doctrines as contradict the main design of Christianity, which was to promote true holiness, they are not to be hearken'd to, nor is the sense which they give of any particular text of Scripture to be receiv'd; because it contradicts the chief design of Religion in general and of Christianity in particular, which plainly tells us, That Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (b), and gave him-*

(a) 1 Tim. vi. 3.

(b) 1 John iii. 8.

self for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (a).

For instance, if any one interpret those texts of Scripture which maintain our *justification by faith only*, or our *salvation by free grace*, to such a sense as excludes the necessity of *good works*, such an interpretation is to be rejected, because it contradicts the main design of Christianity, which was to *make us holy as God is holy (b)*, and *cleanse us from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit (c)*. This doctrine is so often and plainly insisted upon by the holy writers, that the number and evidence of Scripture authority, as to this point, ought in all reason to over-balance (d) any argument drawn

(a) Tit. ii. 14.

(b) 1 Pet. i. 15.

(c) 2 Cor. vii. 1.

(d) *Regula omni rei semper ab initio constituta ex pluribus in pauciora prescribit.* Tertull. advers. Præxam. c. 20.

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from a few obscure passages, that may seem at first sight to look another way. For this rule ought inviolably to be observ'd in judging of the sense of Scripture, *never to interpret an obscure text in such a sense, as to make it contradict a plain one (a)*. For certainly we must judge of what is obscure from what is plain; not on the contrary; because the rule whereby we judge ought to be more known than the thing is upon which we are to pass our Judgment. And yet this is the usual method of those who maintain some singular conceit or opinion: If they can find but one passage of Scripture that seems to countenance it, they presently lay hold of that, and will hardly give a fair hearing to any other texts, how plain soever, that might help to

(a) *Inbærendum est iis quæ in scriptura sunt aperta, ut ex iis revelentur obscura.* August. de Merit. Peccat. l. 3. c. 4.

expound this single passage, and set it in it's true light.

3. The third rule I would recommend for this purpose, *To compare one place of Scripture with another.*

This rule St Paul has likewise recommended to us by his own practice, (a) *We speak*, saith he, *not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.* Not to exclude any other helps for understanding the holy text from their due usefulness, it is a common, and true observation, that *Scripture doth best interpret itself.* This we may assign, as one reason, why the *Bible* is not writ with an exact order, or the artificial method of a system of Divinity; but the same truths are

(a) 1 Cor. ii. 12.

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often repeated and inculcated over again. This neglect of art and method may perhaps give offence to some overnice palates ; but 'tis really of great use, especially to common readers. The very repeating of weighty truths makes a deeper impression upon ordinary understandings ; what is obscurely deliver'd in one place, is more clearly express'd in another ; and what is figuratively set forth in the *old Testament*, is more plainly laid down in the *new*. And in this case the comparing the prediction with the event, does not only add new light to the former, but moreover the holy writers thereby mutually confirm each other's testimony. The comparing one text of Scripture with another, is further useful upon several accounts.

1. This method doth acquaint us with the peculiar phrases of Scripture, and forms of speech which
are

are proper to those languages where-
in the Scriptures were written, by
which means we learn how to re-
concile several texts that seem to
contradict each other. So the doc-
trine of St *Paul* and St *James* con-
cerning *justification by faith*, may
be easily reconcil'd, by observing the
different acceptations of the word
faith in the holy writers.

2. From hence, in the next place, we
learn in what sense we are to under-
stand several *metaphorical* expressions
which we meet with in the sacred
writings. For instance ; God is
often describ'd there as having hands
and eyes, ears, and bowels, and
other parts of a human body. These
expressions are apt to make us
conceive God to be like our selves,
as some of the antient hereticks did.
To correct so absurd a conceit, we
must compare those places with
those of other texts, which tell us,
that *God is a spirit*, and which up-
braid

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braid the heathen for the absurdness of their idolatry in representing the infinite power and majesty of God by a material and senseless image; thereby supposing God to be like the work of his own hands, and *changing his glory into the likeness of a corruptible creature.* Thus the comparing these several texts together will convince us, that the places which mention the hands, or other parts of God Almighty, intend only to set forth God's knowledge, power and mercy by such sensible representations, as might make a deeper impression of his greatness and majesty upon our carnal minds and affections.

Lastly, The comparing one text with another is particularly useful for explaining the writings of the Prophets, especially those prophecies which relate to the times of the Gospel. For example; when 'tis foretold that *the mountain of the Lord's*

Lord's house should be establisht upon the top of the mountains, and all nations should flow unto it (a): Our Saviour gives the true interpretation of this prophecy, (b) when he tells the woman of Samaria, that the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain [of Samaria] nor that at Jerusalem, worship the Father: But the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; i. e. with a spiritual and reasonable service, without being confin'd to one certain country or place.

4. The last rule I shall offer for the explaining difficult places of Scripture, especially such as relate to the outward government and ordinances of the Church, is, that we should have an especial regard to the practice and usage of the first and

(a) Isa. ii. 1.

(b) Joh. iv. 21, 23.

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purest ages of the Church, and those that were nearest the times of the Apostles.

This direction perhaps is not so proper for the use of unlearned persons; but if it had been observ'd by some that set up for teachers, it would have prevented several disputes that have very much disturb'd the peace of the Church.

'Tis a receiv'd maxim, *that every law is best explain'd by the subsequent practice*; and if we apply this rule to the Christian law, 'tis certain that the primitive Christians had better advantages of knowing the mind of the Apostles, and the sense of their writings, meerly by living so near the apostolic age, than the greatest industry or learning can furnish us with, that live at this distance. And to suppose that the Christians who liv'd in those early days, would either carelessly lay aside, or wilfully deviate from the rules and orders

orders which the Apostles gave to the Church by the direction of God's Spirit, is a great reflection upon the providence of God and his care of the Church, upon the honour of our holy religion, which, upon this supposition, could not maintain it's first constitution so long as most human polities have done, and upon the memory of those glorious confessors and witnesses to Christianity, who planted the Gospel with their preaching, and water'd it with their blood, and on whose credit and testimony the authority of the Scripture-canon it self does very much depend.

So much reason is there for our paying a due deference to the judgment and practice of the primitive Church, in doubts relating to the writings and institutions of the Apostles. And perhaps the only visible means that is left to heal the breaches which distract the catholic Church, would be, if all parties

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parties were willing to refer their differences to the arbitration of the *four first ages*. At least, if men would hearken to the judgment of the earliest times of Christianity, it would be a very proper means to put an end to some disputes, which do very much disturb our present age and Church, as will appear by instancing in a few particulars.

I. There have been, and still are, several disputes relating to original sin, the nature of the gospel covenant, and the means of entering into it, which would be in a great measure silenc'd, if men would but have a regard to the sense and usage of the primitive times; when the *baptizing of infants* was universally practis'd in all churches, as can be plainly prov'd by undeniable testimony. *Pelagius* and his followers were the first that openly deny'd the doctrine of original sin: And when they were urg'd with the argument

ment taken from infant baptism, they could not deny but the practice of it was as old as Christianity itself, (a) tho' the granting thus much did, in effect, overthrow the whole scheme of principles which they had advanc'd against the receiv'd doctrine of the catholic Church. The great esteem which the primitive Christians had for the sacrament of the Lord's supper, their looking upon it as the highest part of the christian worship, and never omitting the use of it upon their solemn days of devotion, sufficiently discovers what their opinion was concerning the death and sacrifice of Christ therein commemorated, and that they esteemed it to be the meritorious cause of their redemption.

(a) Cœlestii Pelagian. verba ap. Augustin. l. 2. contr. Pelag. & Cœlestium c. 5. *Infantes deberi baptizari in remissionem peccatorum, secundum regulam Universalis Ecclesiæ, & secundum Evangelii sententiam, confitemur.* Eadem fatentem Pelagium videre est, ibid. c. 17, 18.

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So that the *Socinians*, who deny the merit of Christ's death and sufferings, act very consistently with themselves in laying aside the use of this holy sacrament; but at the same time they confess that their doctrine, as well as their practice, in this particular, is a direct contradiction to the judgment of the universal Church in the best and purest ages.

2. Every one is sensible what eager disputes there are on foot about church-government, and how common it is to hear unlearned and ignorant people, who can't possibly be judges of the merits of the cause, exclaim against the government of *Bishops* as antichristian, and the introducing of tyranny and ambition into the Church. To bring this controversy to a short issue, we only desire our adversaries would grant us these two things, which seem to be modest and reasonable requests. First, that the Scripture is at least as favourable
to

to Episcopacy as to any other form of church-government, which they would set up in it's room : (They that will not grant this, shew that they never thoroughly study'd this controversy.) And, secondly, that the sense of the Scriptures, as to this point, may be decided by the judgment of the primitive Church, as the most competent witness of the practice of the Apostles. 'Tis certain, that several of those who were the disciples to the Apostles, such as *Timothy*, *Titus*, *Ignatius*, *Polycarp*, *Clemens Romanus*, and *Dionysius the Areopagite*, (a) &c. did exercise the episcopal office, the same for substance which is practis'd in our Church at this day ; *i. e.* they had in their single capacity the chief care and oversight of many particular churches or congregations (b) : Not to insist now,

(a) V. *Euseb.* Hist. Eccl. l. 3. c. 4. and l. 4. c. 23.

(b) See this fully prov'd in *Dr Maurice's* defence of Diocesan Episcopacy.

that

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that St *James*, one of the twelve Apostles, did plainly exercise the episcopal office, having his residence fixt at *Jerusalem*, and presiding over the elders and church there (a). 'Tis as evident that there could be no room for ambition, or secular interest in these early times, when all the advantage that bishopricks brought along with them was a nearer step to sufferings and martyrdom. 'Tis no less certain, that this form of government was universally settled over the whole Christian Church, in the age immediately succeeding the times of the Apostles. The adversaries of Episcopacy have been often challeng'd to produce one single example of any Church settled without Bishops, for the space of above fifteen hundred years after Christ; and they have not yet been able to give any instance to the contrary, that could satisfy any per-

(a) See Acts xxi. 18. xii. 17. xv. 13.

son of ordinary learning or judgment.

Now after such pregnant proofs of the antiquity of the episcopal government, for men still to cry out upon it as a remnant of Popery, is to make Popery much older than it really is, and thereby give greater advantage to it's cause, than it becomes those men to do who profess themselves to be such zealous Protestants. For if it is once yielded that Popery was settled in the times next to the apostolic age, it will be no hard matter for the emissaries of that Church to persuade people, that what we call Popery is really the true and primitive state of Christianity. Such advantage does a *rash and ignorant zeal against Popery* afford to that very cause, which it seems with so much vehemence to oppose. And as a great master of controversy hath observ'd, (a) "Those who forego the testi-

(a) *Bishop Stillingfleet, Preface to the Unreasonableness of Separation, p. 5.*

"mony

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“ many of antiquity, as all oppo-
 “ sers of the Church of *England*
 “ must do, must unavoidably run
 “ into insuperable difficulties in deal-
 “ ing with the Papists, which the
 “ principles of our Church do lead
 “ us thro’, ” whose glory and hap-
 piness it is to have been reform’d by
 the rule of God’s word, and the
 pattern of the best and purest ages:
 Upon which account ’tis so much
 envy’d and maligned by the popish
 party, who, not without reason,
 look upon it as the most formidable
 enemy that they have, because it con-
 futes their false pretences to antiqui-
 ty upon the surest principles.

The inference I shall make from
 what has been said concerning the
 obscurity of several Scripture passages,
 is this, That we ought to read the
 Scriptures with an humble, modest
 and teachable disposition (a) with a

(a) *Omnis scriptura sacra eo spiritu debet legi
 quo scripta est.* Kempis Imit. Christi, l. i. c. 5.

willing-

willingness to embrace all truths which are plainly deliver'd there, how contrary soever to our own former opinions or prejudices : That we ought in matters of difficulty readily hearken to the judgment of our teachers, and those that are set over us in the Lord : That we should check every presumptuous *thought or reasoning* (a) *which exalts itself* against any of those mysterious truths therein reveal'd, still remembering that *God is great, and we know him not* (b), and 'tis possible for us to *search out the* ⁱⁿ *almighty unto perfection* (c). And if we thus search after the truth *in the love of it* (d) we shall not miss of finding that knowledge which will make us wise unto salvation.

(a) Ἀγρισμὸς, 2 Cor. x. 5.

(b) Job xxxvi. 26. (c) Job xi. 7.

(d) 2 Thes. ii. 10.

C H A P. IV.

Concerning the Historical books of the old Testament, and what things are chiefly observable in our reading of them.

HITHERTO I have offer'd only some general considerations, which tend to the illustrating the style of the holy Scriptures, and justifying that method which the holy Spirit hath pitch'd upon for instructing us in all saving truths, and taking off those prejudices which hinder many from the careful reading and study of the holy Scriptures. I shall now proceed to give more particular directions concerning the use we are to make of the several parts of the holy writings. And because I do not intend to treat of every book by itself, I shall consider

sider them under some general heads, to which they may conveniently be reduc'd.

And to begin with the *old Testament*, we may divide the books of it into these four sorts; the *Historical*, the *Moral*, the *Psalms*, and the *Prophets*. I shall make some observations upon each of these general heads, which may help to explain the chief intent and design of those several writings, and the principal uses we are to make of them.

The first that come under our consideration are the historical books.

Reading of history is commonly reckon'd one of the most diverting studies we can entertain our selves with, in which respect the Scripture history has incomparably the advantage above all other writings in that kind, inasmuch as it contains the most ancient records that

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are extant in the world, and relates the most remarkable occurrences that ever happen'd in it. The *Bible* gives us an account of the beginning of the world, and affords us a prospect unto the end of it. It begins with the history of the creation, of the state of innocence, of the deluge, and of the peopling the world afterwards: Of all which wonderful transactions the heathens had only an obscure tradition; a tradition indeed so universally spread, as doth sufficiently attest the truth of the Scripture records, as to each of these particulars; but withal so mixt and darken'd with fabulous circumstances, as very much weaken'd the credit of the whole relation. So that those who could not have recourse to a more authentic account of these important affairs, were in doubt whether the world had any beginning or not, and from thence came to question the being of it's author.

The

The sacred history gives likewise an account of the fall of man, of the entrance of sin into the world, and those many evils and calamities which it brought along with it. This the wisest Philosophers were very much puzzled to trace the original of, or give a satisfactory reason, how so much evil should come into a world that was made by a good God. But the Scripture account displays both the justice and goodness of God in this matter, because it discovers to us, that God took occasion from thence to make known the riches of his mercy toward the lost sons of *Adam*, by sending his own Son into the world to redeem them, that *where sin had abounded, grace might much more abound (a)*. Here we see the scene of man's redemption beginning to open immediately after the creation, to shew

(a) Rom. v. 20.

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us that *Christ was the end of the law* (a), and of all the dispensations of Providence which preceded it; that *he* (b) *was the Lamb slain* in the purpose and decree of God, *before the foundation of the world*, and promis'd ἀπὸ χρόνων αἰώνων *from or before ancient times* (c), tho' for great and wise reasons *he did not appear till towards the* (d) *conclusion of the ages of the world*. So we find one and the same design pursu'd from one end of the *Bible* to the other, and all the sacred writers agree in displaying the *great mystery of godliness* by various steps and degrees, from the promise of the blessed *seed* in Paradise (e), to the end and consummation of all things.

I am sensible that there are great difficulties to be met with in the

(a) Rom. x. 4.

(b) Rev. xiii. 8.

(c) Tit. i. 2. confer LXX. Interp. ad Psal. lxxvii.

5. Isai. lxiii. 9, 11.

(d) Ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, Heb. ix. 26.

(e) Gen. iii. 15.

three first chapters of *Genesis*, which have made some ancient writers question whether all the particulars therein related were to be understood literally or not: And of late an opinion has much prevail'd, which maintains that *Moses wrote this part of his history as a law-giver, and not as a philosopher.*

If the meaning of this expression be, that *Moses* did not write with that accuracy of phrase, or with those terms of art which *Des Cartes* or *Galilæo* would have done upon the same subject, it is readily granted; for such a discourse would have been above the apprehension of common understandings, and so not answer'd the intent of *Moses's* writing. I think we may without derogation to the Scripture authority, own that the Philosophy of it is popular, and suited to the apprehensions of the unlearned: of which kind we may allow those Scripture expressions to be, which suppose the
sun

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sun to move, and the earth to stand still; and I can't see why we should lay such a stress upon them, as out of deference to their authority, to check any philosophical enquiries which may favour the contrary opinion; since the greatest asserters of the earth's motion would in a popular discourse comply with the common way of speaking. But when this pretence is carry'd so far, as to explode the history of the *six days creation*, deliver'd with such particular circumstances by *Moses*, and those confirm'd by the rest of the sacred writers, and to reject his whole narrative as a piece of pure invention, because it doth not agree with an *hypothesis*, where I think it is plain, that invention has a very great share; and where the difficulties that may be objected, will be found to be greater: Such an undertaking betrays the over-fondness ingenious men are apt to have for their own schemes, and the little regard they pay to
Scripture

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. 81

Scripture authority, when it stands in competition with a beloved notion.

I would not be thought to undervalue Philosophy, which is certainly a noble and useful study, as it searches out the wisdom of God in his works. But I think it may find employment enough, without entering into that nice and uncertain speculation, how God made the world, which a modern Philosopher of some note has look'd upon as an undertaking above the reach of human understanding (*a*); which may very well content itself, with enquiring by what laws nature works ever since it's settlement at the creation, and not presume to confine God almighty to the same rules in creating the world, which inferior agents are ty'd to follow in continuing it. For we may observe,

(*a*) *Majus est mundus opus, quam ut assequi mens humana ejus molitionem possit.* Gassend. Physic.

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that even in the ordinary course of generation, the first vital functions are not perform'd in the same manner before the formation of the heart, liver, and brain, as they are when the *fœtus* is brought to perfection. And granting this difference between God's works whilst they were making, and after they were made, and the course of nature settled, I doubt not but *Moses's* history of the creation will deserve that character, which one that was an eminent Philosopher, as well as a good Divine (*a*) gives of it, *viz.* *That it is such a plain, brief, and unaffected account of the creation, as must needs recommend itself to the belief of all impartial men.*

Especially if we add this consideration to the former, *viz.* That *Moses's* principal design in writing this history of the six days creation, was to give a plain intel-

(*a*) *Bp. Wilkins of Nat. Relig.* p. 65.

ligible account of the visible part of it (*a*), or of this planetary system, which has the sun for its center, as our excellent expositor Bishop *Patrick* speaks, in order to the confuting that sort of idolatry, which chiefly prevail'd in his time, and consisted in giving worship to the heavenly bodies, or some principal parts of the lower world.

These two considerations will, I presume, afford a sufficient answer to the philosophical objections which are commonly urg'd against the Scripture history of the creation. But because *some modern hypotheses*, whatever reputation they may have procur'd to their authors, yet have manifestly tended to weaken the credit of *Moses's* account of the primæval state of the world, it may not be amiss briefly to vindicate the authority of this first, and as I may

(*a*) *V. Cyril. l. 2. cont. Julian. p. 50. &c. Edit. Spanhem.*

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justly call it, fundamental part of Scripture revelation, by pointing out the most remarkable strokes of divine wisdom, which are so conspicuous in this narrative, that some of them have been honourably mention'd, even by heathens themselves.

And the first remarkable passage I shall take notice of is, that *Moses* ascribes the creation of the world wholly to the free pleasure of God, and assigns no other cause of it, but the divine decree, which he expresses by God's pronouncing the (a) *Fiat* within himself. Now this is so worthy a conception of the almightiness of the divine will, that *Longinus* (b), who look'd upon *Moses* only as a wise law-giver, not as an inspir'd writer, pitches upon this expression as an instance of

(a) Gen. i. 3.

(b) Περὶ Ὑψ., Sect. 7.

the true *sublime*, as having a grandeur in it suitable to the majesty of the person whom he represents, and such as conveys to our minds a just idea God's omnipotence. The truth here asserted ought the more to be regarded, because it was above the reach of some of the wisest philosophers, who thought that God's goodness could not lie idle and not exert itself ; and from thence infer'd, that since God was good from all eternity, the world must be co-eternal with him. Whereas reason itself, rightly inform'd, instructs us, that tho' God be essentially good, yet as he is, or can be, a debtor to none, so the emanations of his goodness must be free and unconstrained, and consequently the exercise of it must be limited by such measures as seem best to his infinite wisdom. And this doctrine, which is so clearly deducible from the place before us, is expressly deliver'd in that heavenly hymn,
recorded

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recorded in the *revelation* (a), *thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

The next remarkable passage, which I shall recommend to the devout reader's observation, is, that *rest* which *Moses* (b) informs us God enjoy'd, when he had finish'd his works of creation. And I the rather insist upon this passage, because 'tis mention'd with approbation by that eminent Philosopher my Lord *Bacon* (c), and therefore I hope his judgment may screen it from the censure of being a *popular and unphilosophical notion*. For we are not to understand by it, such a rest as poor mortals are refresh'd with after their being wearied with hard labour, but that pleasure which the Almighty took in viewing his works, and pronouncing them to be ex-

(a) Ch. iv. 11. (b) Gen. ii. 2. (c) *Preface to Instaur. magna, & alibi.*

ceeding good, which the *Psalmist* calls the *Lord's rejoicing in his works* (a). Whereas in all that *fore travel which God gives to the sons of men to be exercis'd therewith*, they can take no lasting rest nor comfort, but find all of them to end in *vanity and vexation of spirit*.

It is likewise agreed by the unanimous consent of all interpreters, both *Jewish* and *Christian*, that the *Sabbath*, a feast of God's own immediate institution, was design'd to typify and represent that *heavenly rest which remains for the people of God* (b) after this world is ended, when they shall cease from the labours and troubles of life, see God and contemplate his works with the greatest pleasure and delight, and also take a view of their own good works with comfort and satisfaction; for the Scripture tells

(a) *Psal. civ. 31.*

(b) *Heb. iv. 9.*

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us (a), that they will also *follow us*, or *go along with us* (b) into that state of bliss.

The same consent of antiquity will justify us in assigning this as one reason, why God thought fit to divide the creation into six days work; *viz.* to pre-signify that this world should last six millennaries of years, (according to that maxim of Scripture (c), That one day is with the Lord as a thousand years) and then the Sabbath, or *millennium* of rest, should follow.

However that be, the arguments which learned men (d) have brought to prove that the Sabbath was observ'd by the patriarchs from the very creation, and that the fourth commandment, and the preceding institution mention'd, *Exod. xvi. 23.* was only a revival of that primi-

(a) Rev. xiv. 13. (b) Ακολουθεῖ μετ' αὐτῶν. Comp. Luke ix. 49. (c) 2 Pet. iii. 8.

(d) See Bishop Usher's *Epist.* 205. and Dr. Allix's *Reflections upon Genesis, Chap. vi.*

tive usage which had been intermitted during the *Egyptian* bondage; as also that custom which has generally prevail'd among all nations, of reckoning their their time by a septenary revolution of days (*a*). All these arguments, I say, are a very good proof that *Moses's* account of the six days work of creation is literally true.

A third particular that deserves our notice in the Scripture history of the creation, is the account which *Moses* gives us of the nature and origin of the soul, *viz.* that it was not made out of matter, but immediately created by God, and breathed into the body which was form'd out of dust; that it is the *breath of life*, which gives life, sense, and motion to the body: Nay, that it has a principle of true divine life in

(*a*) *V. Theophil. ad Autolycum. l. 2. p. 95. Edit. Oxon. & Grotii notas ad l. c. 16. de Veritat. Chr. Relig.*

itself,

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itself, *being made after the image and likeness of God*, the intellectual perfections of human understanding and will, bearing the nearest resemblance to the divine nature of any powers we can discover in this lower part of the creation. From whence it follows, that the soul has a happiness of it's own, independant of the body, and consequently is capable of a divine and heavenly state. I hope this may pass for a strain above vulgar notions, and gives as good an account of the dignity and prerogatives of human souls, as the acutest philosophers can furnish us with.

Fourthly, *Moses* makes the institution of marriage co-equal with the creation, and confines it to one man and one woman, or at least represents this as the most perfect and primitive pattern of that state ; which is such a wise and just restraint of mens appetites, as the laws

laws or manners of few nations before the times of Christianity did countenance. Hereby we are instructed likewise that the state of matrimony is the ordinance of God, and not only the prudent institution of human law-givers, as the heathens generally thought it to be.

I have already observ'd that *Moses* gives us a better account of man's fall, than the wisest of the heathens could attain to, tho' they reasonably concluded from the unruliness of mens passions, and the want of sufficient power in the mind to check and controul them, that there was a lapse, or weakning, of the higher powers of the soul (*a*), whereby it had lost that dominion which it originally had over the whole man: So that the Scripture

(*a*) Homo non ut a matre, sed ut a noverca natura editus est in vitam ——— animo anxio ad molestias, humili ad timores, molli ad labores, prono ad libidines, in quo tamen inest tanquam obrutus quidam divinus ignis ingenii & mentis. *Cicero apud Augustin. l. 4. contr. Julianum.*

history

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history of this matter ought to be valued, if it were only for this reason, that it is the only account that hath been transmitted to us of that universal corruption which has overspread the world, and which all men have reason to be sensible of, and to lament. Thus much may be said in general for the justification of that part of the *Mosaic* history; and if we proceed to examine the several circumstances of this story, we may observe that *Moses* has in a very lively manner describ'd the passions and weak side of human nature, in the account he gives us of the fall.

First, He gives us to understand, that the tempter infus'd into *Eve* a dislike of her own condition, and an aiming at a happiness above it: Accordingly experience justifies the truth of this observation, *that pride goes before a fall*; and ambition and discontent are the usual inlets to ruin and misery.

The

The lovely aspect of the forbidden fruit does admonish us, that present temptations work more powerfully upon our senses and affections, than dry thinking and reasoning can do upon our judgments.

As soon as our parents had eaten the forbidden fruit, the text tells us, that (a) *the eyes of them both were open'd*; implying, that their eyes were open'd in a different sense from that which the tempter had insinuated to them (b), *viz.* to apprehend clearly the evil they had done, and the misery they had brought upon themselves, thereby instructing us in this great and useful truth, that however sin may blind the eyes while we are in the eager pursuit of it, yet when it is once finish'd and the pleasure over, the mask is taken off, and it appears in it's true colours; the mind is awaken'd to a thorough sense of the greatness of the

(a) Gen. iii. 7. (b) Ibid. viii. 5.

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crime, and her own folly in committing it. *Perfecto demum scelere, magnitudo ejus intellecta est*, as that accurate describer of human nature, *Tacitus* (a), represents it.

Their *hiding themselves among the trees of the garden* (b) is a lively representation of cowardliness of guilt, and that the *noise of a shaken leaf* is enough to fright those that are conscious to themselves that they deserve punishment.

Having mention'd this circumstance, I shall venture to digress a little for the explaining the true meaning of the whole verse where 'tis mention'd, because I find great exception taken against the literal sense of the former part of it, where 'tis said, that our first parents *heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day*, as if it were a very improper representation of the divine nature. But

(a) *Annal.* lib. xiv. (b) *Gen.* iii. 8.

surely

surely that learned person who makes this objection, is too well acquainted with antiquity, to be ignorant, that it was the unanimous sense of the ancient Church, both (a) *Jewish* and *Christian* (b), that as God made the world by his Son, all the dispensations of providence, especially the affairs of the Church, were order'd and dispos'd by him. This opinion is built upon those texts of Scripture, where the incommunicable name of *Jehovah* is given to an angel (c) and can't be reasonably understood of any other but the Son of God, who is expressly call'd *the angel of the covenant*, by the prophet *Malachi* (d): This second per-

(a) See *Dr Allix's Judgment of the Jewish Church against the Unitarians, especially c. 13, 14, 15.*

(b) See the *Proofs, both from the New Testament, and the Primitive Fathers, in Bishop Bull's Defens. Fid. Nic. c. 1. §. 1.*

(c) See *Gen. xxii. 11, 12, 15, 16, 18. ch. xxxi. 11, 13. Exod. iii. 2, 4, 6. ch. xxiii. 20, 21. comp. with Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3, 14. and with ch. xiii. 21. and ch. xiv. 19.*

(d) *Malachi iii. 1.*

son

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son of the blessed Trinity, as he sometimes took upon him the character of an angel, so at other times he assumed an human shape, as an emblem, or earnest, of the incarnation. Thus he appear'd to *Abraham* (a), to *Jacob* (b), to *Joshua* (c), to *Gideon* (d); and 'tis altogether as probable he might converse with our first parents under the same shape in paradise, as it is particularly affirm'd by *Theophilus Antiochenus* (e); and those expressions, *let us make man*, and *Adam is become like one of us*, plainly imply a plurality of divine persons concern'd in these transactions, and were always interpreted to that sense by the ancient writers, both *Jews* and *Christians*. And as for the expression of God's *walking in the wind*, or

(a) Gen. xviii. 2, 13, 17, 22, 26.

(b) Gen. xxxii. 24

(c) Josh. v. 13, 14, 15.

(d) Judg. vi. 11, 14, 16, 21.

(e) Lib. 2. *ad Autolycum*. p. 129. Ed. Oxon.

cool of the day, it is a manifest allusion to the time of walking in those hot countries, which was usually toward the evening.

But if this sense of the words be not accepted, they are fairly capable of another, by joining the participle [walking] with the substantive [voice,] and translating the words thus, *they heard the voice of the Lord God dispersing itself*, (so the phrase is us'd *Jerem. xlv. 22.*) or *waxing loud*, or *increasing among the trees of the garden*. Thus the word תִּלְר signifies, when 'tis joyn'd with קוֹל *Exod. xix. 19.* and then the sense will be, that the divine *Schechinah* appear'd with a terrible sound accompanying it as a token of God's displeasure. A still voice is sometimes metioned in Scripture (a) as a mark of God's presence; and the very apprehension of his appearing is enough to put guilty persons in a great consternation; but

(a) See 2 Sam. v. 24. 1 Kings xix. 12.

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a stormy wind and tempest is the token of his coming with anger and vengeance (a). And taking the words in either of these senses, the context seems to favour the exposition; for when God call'd *Adam*, in the following verse, he replies, *I heard thy voice in the garden, and was afraid.*

I am sensible that there are several difficulties relating to the *three first chapters of Genesis*, which still want to be placed in a better light; and in order to the clearing them, we must acknowledge, that sometimes a mystical and spiritual sense is hidden under a literal one: That by the *Serpent* we are to understand the *Devil*, making use of the *Serpent* as his instrument, is confirm'd by the unanimous exposition of the sacred writers themselves, and those both of the *old* and *new Testa-*

(a) See Psal. xviii. 10, 14. Isa. xxx. 30. Ezek. xiii. 13.

ment (a). Nor indeed was it congruous, that *Moses*, who had taken notice only of the visible creation, should presently introduce angels or spirits into this lower world. In like manner by the *nakedness*, at the discovery of which our first parents were confounded immediately upon their fall, we are not only to understand the nakedness of the body, but likewise their minds being divested of it's natural ornaments of purity and innocence (b). By that *strict guard* which is kept about the tree of life, we are to understand that eternal life is a happiness out of our reach, and from which we must be totally excluded, unless Christ gives us power to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God, which he has promis'd to do to his faithful servants (c).

(a) Isa. xxvii. 1. Luke x. 19. John viii. 44. Rev. xii. 9. xx. 2.

(b) Compare Exod. xxxii. 25. Rev. iii. 18. xvi. 15. 2 Cor. v. 3. (c) Rev. ii. 7.

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I shall leave the further pursuit of this argument to those that have understanding in the depths of the holy oracles, who in this, as well as in many other parts of the Scriptures, will discover several important truths to be couch'd under such expressions, as a careless and unattentive reader would take little or no notice of, and shall only just observe, that two of the principal difficulties relating to this place, *viz.* concerning the *situation of paradise*, and why the tempter discours'd with *Eve* under the shape of a *Serpent*, have been happily clear'd by two learned critics of our own age; the one by Monsieur *Huet*, in his accurate treatise, *de Paradiso*; the other by his present *Grace of Canterbury*, in his learned discourse of *Idolatry* (a), who observes that the *Hebrew* word *Saraph*, which signifies a *fiery Serpent* (b), in the plural *Seraphim*, de-

(a) P. 356. (b) Numb. xxi. 6. Deut. viii. 15. Isa. xiv. 19.

notes likewise an *order of angels with wings (a)*, who by the clearness and brightness of their aspect, appear as it were flaming and fiery. From whence this most reverend author ingeniously conjectures that the Devil appear'd in the form of such a fiery Serpent, as resembled a flaming angel, and so was mistaken by *Eve* for one of those bright *Seraphims*, which made up part of the *Schechinah* of the *Logos*; and from the same grounds assigns the reason why Serpents were esteem'd sacred and worshipp'd in several parts of the *Heathen* world.

My chief design being to illustrate the sense, and assert the authority of Holy Scripture, I thought it would be no improper digression, if I spent some time in clearing the sense of this important portion of Holy Writ, and vindicating it from some objections, which have been

(a) Isa. vi. 2, 6.

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of late industriously reviv'd against it's credit and authority. And I hope, that what has been said, may be in some measure serviceable to satisfy mens doubts in this point, and to preserve a due reverence for this most primitive part of the antiquities of the world, and upon the truth of which the authority of *both Testaments* doth very much depend.

Another particular relating to the books of *Moses*, which I would recommend to the observation of the attentive reader, is this, that in his writings, and indeed throughout the *old Testament*, we may observe two different systems or schemes of religion (a) if I may so term them, the one of the patriarchs, prophets, and eminent persons among the *Jews*; the other more adapted to the temper of the more ignorant

(a) See Euseb. præparat. Evang. lib. 7. c. 6, 7, &c.

and

and inferior sort, and most regarded by those who liv'd in the corrupt and degenerate times of the *Jewish* state.

The former is an institution purely spiritual, and built upon the foundations of natural religion, (whose principles are there plac'd in their truest and best light) especially upon these two fundamental principles of it, the love of God above all things, of our neighbour as ourselves (a). It enjoins men to *do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God* (b): To live under a grateful sense of God's providence, and a comfortable hope of obtaining his promises, especially that great one concerning the Messias, and all those heavenly blessings of which he was to be the author. The law taken in this sense, St Paul calls *spiritual and holy, and just and good* (c), and those Jews that

(a) See Mark xii. 28, &c. (b) Mich. vi. 8.
(c) Rom. vii. 12, 14.

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practised it, he calls Jews *inwardly*, whose *circumcision was that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter*. Rom. ii. and with a regard to this more perfect part of the *Mosaic* dispensation, he often insists upon these points, that the Fathers, *Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, were justify'd by faith, as well as we Christians* (a), that all the faithful, both before and under the law, *eat the same spiritual meat, drank the same spiritual drink* (b) and *embraced the same heavenly promises* (c), which are now more explicitly reveal'd by the Gospel.

The other system of religion consisted meerly in outward observances, either such as related to the public worship of God in the tabernacle, or concern'd mens private behaviour in the ordinary way of life.

(a) Heb. xi. 2, &c. Rom. iv. 13. Gal. iii. 8, 17, 18. (b) 1 Cor. x. 3, 4. (c) Heb. xi. 13.

And

And these the same Apostle (*a*) styles *weak and beggarly elements*.

The former of these none can deny to be worthy of God; for it lays down a much more perfect scheme of religion than the wisest *Heathens* could ever discover by the dim light of corrupt nature; and it is often taken notice of by the ancient Fathers (*b*), and the other learned advocates for Christianity (*c*), that the best notions the Philosophers and Heathen Legislators had about religious matters were drawn from the writings of the *old Testament*.

But the other part of the *Mosaical* system, consisting chiefly of external rites and ordinances, hath been thought by *Infidels* a considerable ob-

(*a*) Gal. iv. 9.

(*b*) *Vid.* Justin. M. Apol. II. (Verius I.) n. 76, 77. Edit. Oxon. Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 1. p. 302. l. 2. p. 394. l. 5. p. 391. Euseb. Præp. Evan. l. 9. c. 3. l. 13. c. 7. & alibi passim.

(*c*) Huetii Demonstr. Evang. Prop. 4. c. 2. n. 14. & c. 11, per totum.

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jection against the divine authority of the law of *Mosès*, as containing in it such unaccountable injunctions, as they think unworthy of the wisdom of God.

But the force of this objection will be taken off by these two considerations. 1. That some of the *Jewish* laws and ordinances which seem strange to us, had a particular respect to the rights and religious customs of the neighbouring nations, as has been fully prov'd by learned men (a), and is confess'd by that learned *Jew Maimonides* (b): God intending to preserve the *Jews* from falling into the idolatries of the *Heathen*, partly by retaining in their laws some indifferent customs of theirs, innocently introduc'd; and partly, by instituting other ceremonies in opposition to the cruel, impure and absurd rites, which the

(a) See particularly *Dr Spencer de Legib. Hebr.*

(b) *More Nevoch, par. 3. c. 29. & sequent.*

Pagans us'd in the worship of their idols. 2. That several precepts of the ceremonial law have a *moral sense* couch'd under them, it being the ancient way of instructing men by outward signs and symbolical representations, as appears by the famous *Symbols of Pythagoras*: A method of instruction which he probably learnt from the *Eastern Sages*, with whom he had convers'd (a). To this sense, *Josephus* expounds (b) many precepts of the ceremonial law, and several places of the (c) *new Testament* do plainly favour such an interpretation. And the precept of circumcision is expounded to a moral sense by *Moses* himself, *Deut. x. 16. 3.* That a great part of the rites enjoin'd in the service of God by the ordinances of the law, were a *figure or parable*

(a) See *Prov. i. 6.*

(b) *Antiq. l. 4.*

(c) See *Acts x. 14, 15, 28. 1 Cor. v. 6, 7. and ch. ix. 9.*

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for the time then present (a) did typify and exhibit in mystical representations the days of the Messias, as the Apostles have fully prov'd in their writings, particularly St Paul in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, the *Jews* themselves of those times agreeing with them in the same notions (b), as several of the more modern *Jews* have done since. Indeed without supposing the ceremonial law to be a figure of the Gospel, 'tis as hard to reconcile these two schemes of the *Jewish* religion with each other, as with the Gospel itself. Whereas if we compare the (c) rudiments of the law with the more perfect revelation of the Gospel, and explain them by the light which that lets in upon them, we presently see the *veil taken away from the face of Moses*, and are able to *look to the end* or principal

(a) Παραβολὴ εἰς τὸν καίρον τὸν ἐνεσῶτα.
Heb. ix. 9.

(b) See Philo's *Writings*.

(c) Στοιχεῖα, Gal. iv. 9.

design

design of *that* institution, *which* tho' ordain'd by God himself, *was to be abolish'd*, and give place unto a better. So that this very objection affords us a new proof of the divine original of the holy Scriptures, because it helps to discover the harmony and connexion of the several parts of those divine writings.

The next remarkable passage relating to the books of *Moses*, which I would desire the attentive reader to take particular notice of, is, God's chusing *Abraham* and his seed, separating them from the rest of the world, and making a covenant with them, that he would be their God, and they should be his people; and that in the fulness of time the promis'd seed should arise out of that nation. This was the first great step that God made toward the fulfilling the promise of the *Messias*: In order to the making which promise good, it was fit that God should make choice of some particular family,

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mily, or people, from whence he should descend, or else he must have sprung from idolaters, which would have been by no means suitable to the dignity of his person, or the design of his coming. Accordingly the people from whence he was to derive his original, was separated from all the rest of the world by a peculiar set of rites and ordinances, which made them nicely scrupulous of conversing or mixing with other nations. It was likewise convenient, that Christ should not come into the world without some necessary preparations, in order to his due reception there. Thereupon God sanctify'd a people on purpose, among whom Christ should be born, and rais'd up a succession of prophets among them, who foretold all the circumstances relating to his appearance, from whose writings a certain description might be given of him, whenever he should appear.

If

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. III

If so great a person had of a sudden appear'd in the world without any notice given of his coming, the unexpectedness of so extraordinary a blessing might have caus'd wonder and surprize; but it would not have been reckon'd an effect of *God's determinate counsel and fore-knowledge*, and of that *πολυποίκιλος σοφία* that manifold wisdom (a), which by various steps and degrees carry'd on this design for the space of four thousand years together, before it was fully compleat and brought to perfection. But when the Messiah was usher'd into the world with so much previous pomp and solemnity, this was a sensible demonstration that this *great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh*, was the master-piece of the divine wisdom, and that all the lesser dispensations of providence were subservient to this great end.

(a) Eph. iii. 10.

This

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This variety of prophecies which prepar'd the way for the coming of the Messias, doth likewise afford a satisfactory answer to that objection, which worldly-minded men are apt to suggest against the obscurity of Christ's birth and manner of living. They think it strange, that the Saviour of mankind should be born, and live obscurely in a corner; that he that is describ'd *as the desire of all nations* (a), must be sought for in *Palestine*, an inconsiderable spot of ground, and in *Galilee*, the most despicable part of that country.

In reply to which objection, I shall not now insist upon the answer which *St Paul* (b) gives to it, that God's power doth then most eminently appear, when *he chuses the weak and contemptible things of the world to confound the things that are mighty*. It is a sufficient reply to say, that the many prophecies of the *old Te-*

(a) Hag. ii. 7. (b) 1 Cor. i. 27.

stament,

stament, which gave a character of the Messias from his cradle to his grave, render him as easily discoverable, as if he had spent his whole life in the most public place in the world; and like the Star which appear'd at his birth, give a sufficient direction to those that were at the greatest distance where to find him. If such a person was to come into the world, he must necessarily make his first appearance in some particular place or country; and surely no nation so fit for that purpose, as that which had the custody of those oracles which foretold the most remarkable circumstances of his life and actions.

The observations I have hitherto made, do chiefly relate to the account the Scripture gives of those two remarkable occurrences, the *creation of the world*, and the *promise of the Messias*. These are the two *pillars*, or *boundaries of providence*, if I may so speak, and all the

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the wheels and movements of it are confin'd within this sphere. The holy writers call them by the name of the *old and new creation* ; and by their assistance we can take an entire view of both worlds, that which we now live in, and the other which we expect hereafter. And this certainly ought to recommend the sacred writings to the perusal of all those, who have the curiosity either of searching out the original of things, or of prying into their end and conclusion.

Before I leave this head, I shall make one general remark concerning the remaining parts of the *old Testament* history, *viz.* That there we find the history of this nation exactly pursu'd, and in a natural series of events for the space of near one thousand five hundred years, the principal transactions having such a connexion with, and dependance upon, each other, that they do mutually support and confirm one another's

another's credit, as hath been already observ'd (a). During all which time we may take notice that this people were sure to be happy or miserable, according as they kept close to, or departed from, the worship of the true God, and the observance of that law which he had given them. Which circumstance is not only a remarkable instance of God's overruling providence, but likewise a signal verification of those promises and threatnings which God had made the sanction of his laws and ordinances.

I shall close up my remarks upon this head, with this observation, that the main body of the sacred history, and all the chief materials of it, are taken out of the public records and monuments of the nation, to which the writers themselves do often appeal, particularly in the books of *Kings* and *Chronicles*. The

(a) Chap. ii.

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connexion which is observable between the several books of the Scripture history, is likewise a plain indication, that they were digested by public authority, and not the product of private pens. Which one thing is a pregnant proof of the divine authority of the sacred writings, to any one that considers that all the pious princes and magistrates among the *Jews* undertook nothing of moment without advice and direction from God, who rais'd up a succession of prophets among them for that very purpose. In this respect the compilers of the *Jewish* history have very much the advantage, in point of credit, of the historians of most other nations, especially of the *Greek* historians, as *Josephus* (a) observes; inasmuch as the *Greek* writers were neither appointed by authority to preserve the memory of former transactions, nor

(a) Lib. 1. cont. *Appian. initio.*

compil'd

compil'd their writings out of public or ancient records, and were more ambitious of shewing their wit and eloquence, and telling their story in an elegant and plausible style, than of transmitting a faithful account of matters of fact to posterity. Whereas the holy writers discover nothing of vanity or ostentation, of partiality or corrupt affection, but write with a native simplicity, and unaffected air of sincerity, without flattery or prejudice, neither concealing their own private infirmities, nor palliating the vices or miscarriages of their greatest princes, but delivering their thoughts with great freedom, and speaking the truth without reserve: As if their only design was to give God the glory, and recommend their writings to the good opinion of their readers by a naked manifestation of the truth, which, when 'tis deliver'd plainly and without disguise, commands an assent, and works

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works more powerfully upon the mind, than all the art in the world.

C H A P. V.

Concerning the Moral Writings of the Old Testament.

THE books of the *old Testament* that come next under our consideration, are the *moral writings* properly so call'd, *i. e.* such whose chief design is to instruct us in the ways of virtue, and give rules for the direction and good government of our lives. Such are the books of *Job*, the *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*.

The book of *Job* was written on purpose to teach us the great duty of patience and submission to God's will

will in all events: A duty, which it powerfully recommends to us, both by the example of that holy person who was so eminent an instance of *suffering affliction and of patience*; and also by many arguments taken from the consideration of the greatness of God's majesty, with whom it is high presumption for poor mortals to contend; of his infinite purity and holiness, *in whose sight the best men cannot be justify'd, if God will enter into strict judgment with them*: And, lastly, from the unsearchableness of his judgments, which are always true and righteous, tho' we cannot always comprehend the reasons of them. And I doubt not but pious and devout souls may find great pleasure, as well as reap much profit by the careful perusal of this book; which recommends itself to the reader above all other books of holy Writ, by the wit and elegance of the compofure, where human passions

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sions are describ'd with the most tender and lively strokes, where are to be found the most elevated and noble thoughts concerning the power and majesty of God, and the most devout expressions of that submission and resignation which is due to his will, and of that trust and confidence which good men have in his mercy, even in the depth of their afflictions, arising from the testimony of their conscience and the sense of their own integrity. And these pious meditations are clothed in such natural and easie words, as convey to our minds a just idea of *natural Religion* when it was in it's prime, and as it was practis'd in those early ages, before the tradition of the creation and of the flood was lost, or the world quite over-run with idolatry.

The *Proverbs*, as they were written by *Solomon*, a Prince famous in all ages for his wisdom and experience,

so

so they contain excellent instructions for the ordering mens actions in all states and conditions of life, from the highest to the lowest ; and enforce each part of our duty from religious motives : Such as are the obedience due to God, our Creator and Governor, the rewards which attend righteousness, and the punishments which follow wickedness by God's just appointment, both in this world and in the next. In which respect this book has much the advantage above all the moral tracts of the philosophers, in that it presses the practice of our duty from the principles of religion, whereas they persuade us to virtue by arguments taken from the agreeableness of it, to our reason and the dignity of our nature, without taking notice of the authority which God has over us, and whose vicegerent our reason and conscience is, and the obedience which his laws challenge from us, which way soever his will and pleasure

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sure is notify'd to us, whether by the inward dictates of our own mind, or the outward voice of his prophets and messengers (a). We find *Solomon* lays down this rule as the foundation of all his instructions (b), *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. This is a true and solid principle of an universal probity and integrity both of mind and action ; it is such as the meanest is capable of apprehending the force of, and being convinced by it. Whereas the notions of philosophers are only fine speculations to amuse men of subtilty and leisure, and not fitted for the use of ordinary capacities : According to *Tully's* own observation recorded by *Laëtantius*, (c) *Philoso-*

(a) Duplex est regula humanorum actuum, Ratio humana, & Deus ; sed Deus est prima regula, a qua etiam humana Ratio regulanda est ; & ideo virtutes Theologicæ excellentiores sunt virtutibus moralibus. *Aquin. 2da 2dæ qu. 23. Art. 6.*

(b) Prov. i. 7.

(c) *Institut. 1. 3. c. 24. v. Ciceron. initio. l. 2. Tuscul. Quæst. Philosophia est paucis contenta iudiciis, Multitudinem consulto fugiens, &c.*

phia

phia est res abhorrens à multitudine.
It disdains to condescend to vulgar apprehensions. But yet the meanest have souls to be saved as well as the greatest, and that institution must needs be defective which doth not answer the necessities of the far greater part of mankind.

The great sayings of the Philosophers are apt to strike us with admiration at the first hearing, and perhaps prevail with many of our own age to be of *Julian the Apostate's* (d) opinion, who did not stick to prefer the precepts of *Phocylides*, *Theognis*, and *Isocrates*, before the *Proverbs of Solomon*. But when we thoroughly examine the maxims of these, and such like practical treatises, of the heathen philosophers, we shall find many of them to be rather vain-glorious boasts, or the high flights of a fanciful eloquence, than the words

(d) Apud Cyrillum, contr. Julian. l. 7. p. 224.
Edit. Spanheim.

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of truth and soberness. They are such as the authors of them would never abide by when they came to trial : And what force can we then suppose them to have, toward the reforming of habitual offenders? To tell such persons that they act in contradiction to their reason, and below the dignity of their nature, is to make them accountable only to themselves ; and conscience is but an empty name, unless we suppose that it binds men over to appear before a higher Tribunal. So faint are the persuasives and feeble the reproofs of philosophy, when compared with the instructions and motives contain'd in the book of *Proverbs*, which being so peculiarly adapted to the meanest capacities, I would particularly recommend it to their frequent reading and diligent perusal.

The design of the book of *Ecclesiastes* is to convince us of the vanity of all things here below, and that from the experience of one who
had

had try'd what satisfaction could be found in all manner of worldly enjoyments, and was acquainted with the extravagancies of *madness and folly* (e), as well as with the mysteries of wisdom and knowledge. This great prince, who had tried all things, instructs us not to set our hearts too much upon the things of this world, as being empty and unsatisfactory in the enjoyment, and at last ending in *vexation of spirit*: Nor to promise ourselves too much happiness in any worldly blessings, for then we shall be sure to find ourselves disappointed: But to use the good things of this world with sobriety and moderation in respect to our selves, with submission and thankfulness to God, and with charity to our neighbours (f), always remembering that the *fashion of this world passes away*, and the flower of

(e) Eccles. i. 17.

(f) See Eccles. iii. 11, 12, 13, 14. v. 1, &c. vii. 13, 14. ix. 7. xi. 1.

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youth soon decays and withers: And this consideration should engage (g) us to consecrate the best of our years to the service of God, whilst we have a quick and lively sense of his blessings; and not defer the thoughts of religion till *the evil days come*, till old age steal upon us, (which he admirably describes) when we are come to the dregs of life, and death is just ready to seize us, after which comes judgment, and we must give a strict account to God of all our actions.

This is the substance and main design of this book; which if it were seriously read, and consider'd, would be an effectual preservative against the inordinate love of this world, which is the root of all the evil that abounds in it. And to prevent the ill use which men of corrupt minds are apt to make of some passages in it, I shall just ob-

(g) Eccles. xii. 1, &c.

serve,

serve, that those who will read this book with profit, ought to have a regard to the main scope and drift of it, which is plainly set down in the conclusion of the whole (*b*), and not lay hold on one single scrap, or sentence, which they think doth countenance a careless and licentious life. The reader that will fix his eye upon the principal design of this book, will easily perceive that the contradictory opinions which are mentioned in it, are only a representation of the several sentiments of mankind concerning providence and their own souls, or else shew the various thoughts which *Solomon* himself had toss'd up and down in his own mind, which at last came to the resolution where-with he closes his book. The scope and usefulness of which is so fully made out by our excellent expositor, the Lord Bishop of *Ely*,

(*b*) Chap. xii. 13, 14:

G 4

in

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in his *Paraphrase and Commentary*
upon this book, that I shall rather
refer the reader to that useful treatise,
than enlarge any further upon this subject.

CHAP. VI.

*Concerning the Book of Psalms, and
their Usefulness.*

THE book of *Psalms* deserves to be consider'd by itself, as being esteem'd by pious men in all ages, the great storehouse of devotion, and making up a principal part of the public worship both in the *Jewish* and *Christian* Church. Among the *Jews* they were used at the time of their sacrifices, which were the most solemn part of the *Jewish* worship (a). The Evange-

(a) See 1 Chron. xvi. 40, 41. Eccles. i. 16, 17, 18.

lists inform us that our Saviour and his disciples *sung a Hymn* after the paschal supper (b), which learned men suppose to have been the same collection of *Psalms* which the *Jews* used upon that solemnity. St *Paul* exhorts the *Colossians* that the word of God should dwell richly in them, and particularly recommends the *Psalms* to their frequent use (c). St *Jerome* (d) compares the singing of *Psalms* in the public assemblies of Christians in his time, to the heavenly Hallelujahs, which resembled the voice of great thundrings, mention'd *Rev.* xix. 6. and tells (e) us, that the husbandman (f) and common artificers refresh'd themselves in the midst of their work, and sweetened their labours with singing the

(b) *Math.* xxvi. 30. (c) *Coloss.* iii. 16.

(d) *Præfat. in l. 2. Comment. in Epist. ad Galat.* (e) *Epist.* 17. *ad Marcellam. vid. etiam Theodoret. Præf. in Psalm. & Chrysost. de Pœnitent. Hom. 6.*

(f) Γεωργῶμεν αἰνῶντες, πλέομεν ὑμνῶντες.
Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 5. p. 720.

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Psalms of *David*, and at once serv'd God, and attended upon the duties of their calling; from all which it appears, that the book of *Psalms* was design'd by God for the perpetual use of the Church, to be both a pattern and treasure of devotion, at once to enlighten our minds and warm our affections, and teach us *to pray and praise God with the spirit, and with the understanding also.*

There is an agreeable variety in the compofure of the *Psalms*, which are all very beautiful and proper in their seasons, and suited to the several circumstances of devout minds. Some of them instruct us to give God the glory *due unto his name*, and *praise him according to his excellent greatness*, as 'tis made manifest in the works of creation and providence, as particularly the 8th, the 19th, the 33d, the 103d, the 104th, the 107th, and the 148th. Others shew forth his marvellous loving

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. 131

ing-kindness to his Church, to Jacob *his people*, and Israel *his inheritance*; and foretel the glories of Christ's coming, and his kingdom. Of which sort are, the 2d, 45th, 68th, 72d, 78th, 96th, 98th, 105th, 106th, 110th, 111th, 136th, and many more. Again, some *Psalms* declare the excellency of God's law, which he has given us *to be a light to our feet, and a guide to our paths*, and shew the happiness of those who live under the conduct of it. Such are, *Psalms* the 1st, 19th and above all the 119th, which consists of the highest encomiums of God's law, and the most earnest prayers for grace to understand and practise it. At other times the *Psalmist* directs us how to humble ourselves in the sight of God, to implore the pardon of our sins, and help in the time of trouble: Of which kind the most principal *Psalms* are, the 25th, 51st, 130th, 141st, 143d. *Lastly*, In many *Psalms* he exhorts us to sub-

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mit to God's will in all events, and put our trust in his mercy, *to tarry God's leisure* (g), as he sometimes expresses it, *who will never fail those that seek him, and is the helper of the friendless*. Of which sort the most remarkable *Psalms* are, the 9th, 10th, and 11th. Not to mention many others, in several of which the *Psalmist* instructs us not to regard ourselves only ; but likewise to be *mindful of the afflictions of Joseph*, and pray to God to *deliver Israel out of all his troubles*.

So rich a store-house is the book of *Psalms* of all kinds of devotion, and able to furnish every pious soul with holy meditations suitable to his present circumstances, consisting both of the most affectionate prayers and intercessions, and exalted strains of praise and thanksgiving. So deservedly is that divine author styl'd *the sweet Psalmist of Israel* (b), as being

(g) *Psal.* xxvii. 14. (b) 2 *Sam.* xxiii. 1.

the

the great author and pattern of spiritual devotion ; whose soul was touch'd with a heavenly flame, *his heart and his flesh rejoic'd in the living God (i).* *With his whole heart he sung songs, and loved him that made him,* as the son of Syrach gives his character (k), *He made the praises of God glorious,* and was inspir'd to sanctifie poetry and music, to rescue them from that profane use to which they are commonly debased, and employ them upon the noblest subjects, the glories of God, and the grateful acknowledgments of men for his mercies.

The *Psalms* being so excellently fitted to raise our devotions, 'tis very fit to obviate all objections, that may be made against the use of them. Two of the principal prejudices against them I shall briefly consider.

(i) Psal. lxxxiv. 2.

(k) Eccclus. xlvii. 8.

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The first is the *frequent imprecations which are to be found in the Psalms*, which seem not to favour of the true spirit of devotion, but rather to proceed from passion and revenge; and are thought by some to be contrary to the express commands of Christ (l).

This objection I have consider'd and answer'd at large in a former treatise (m), and shall not here repeat what I have there deliver'd, but shall only suggest to the reader two observations, and leave him to apply them to the several imprecations that are to be met with in the *Psalms*.

1. 'Tis not inconsistent with Christian Charity to wish and pray for the prosperity of the righteous; and in order to that, for the disappointment of the devices of the wicked, especially when they are public ene-

(l) Math. v. 43. Chap. v.

(m) Answer to five Letters,

mies and disturbers of the peace of the community. Nor, 2. Is it unlawful to pray, that God's glory may be made manifest by his sending some remarkable judgment upon notorious offenders, in order to their own amendment, and for a terror to others.

The second objection is made against the use of the *Psalms*, as a *standing office of publick worship*; against which it is pretended, that since they were compos'd upon particular exigencies relating to the times and circumstances of their several authors, they can't be so suitable either to the public state of the present Church, or the private necessities of particular Christians.

In answer to which objection it is to be consider'd, that we join in the public service of the Church, not as private persons, but as a religious society; and therefore as members of the same mystical body, we ought to rejoice with those that do rejoice,
and

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and mourn with those that mourn;
i. e. we ought to return thanks to God, not only for his private favours to ourselves, but likewise for his public mercies conferr'd upon our brethren: And in like manner we ought to be mindful of their wants and afflictions, as well as our own, and implore God's help and assistance for all those that are in any trouble or adversity. Granting therefore that some of the deprecatory or thanksgiving *Psalms* may not suit the particular circumstances of each private person; yet since there will be always some among the faithful to whose condition they may be fitly apply'd, we may exercise that Spirit of universal charity in the use of them, which is the peculiar badge of our Christian profession at all times, and the qualification of mind especially requir'd of us, when we join together in the public worship, the most solemn mark or badge of Christian Communion and Fellowship.

To

To which we may add this further consideration, that according to the general sense and exposition of the universal Church, the prayers against temporal enemies which we meet with in the *Psalms*, ought to be apply'd in a mystical sense to our conflicts with our spiritual adversaries: And the thanksgivings for temporal mercies do in a more sublime sense relate to that great deliverance of mankind from sin and death, accomplish'd by our Lord and Saviour. In whom not only all the promises of the *old Testament* receive their utmost completion (n), but likewise all the remarkable occurrences relating to the eminent persons of those times, were so many types and *figures of him that was to come*, and of the redemption which he was to accomplish. And this way of expounding several passages in the *Psalms*, is authoriz'd

(n) 2 Cor. i. 20.

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by Christ himself, who applies those words of the *Psalmist* (o) *they hated me without a cause*, and (p) *he that eats bread with me hath lift up his heel against me*; (which in their primary sense are plainly understood of *David's* enemies) to his own sufferings from the malice of the *Jews*, and the treachery of *Judas*.

(o) *Psalm*. xxxv. 19.

(p) *Psalm*. xli. 9.



C H A P.

C H A P. VII.

*Concerning the Prophetical Writings,
and their Usefulness.*

I Come now in the fourth place to make some observations concerning the prophets, and give directions for the profitable reading of this last part of the *old Testament* writings.

I have elsewhere (a) spoken at large concerning the great design and usefulness of the prophetical writings, and have shew'd that they were intended by God chiefly for these three purposes. 1. To admonish the people of their duty, and quicken them to the practice of it, by setting God's judgments and

(a) Answer to 5 Letters, chap. iii.

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mercies before their eyes. 2. To keep up a sense of providence in their minds. And 3. To foretel the times of the Messias, and prepare mens minds for the reception of him.

I shall not repeat what I have there discours'd upon these heads, but shall only make some further observations upon these books, in order to confirm their divine authority, and shew the chief uses we ought to make of them, and such as we may draw even from the obscurer parts of those writings, where we can't perhaps fully comprehend the full intent and drift of the writer.

I. And the first observation which I shall recommend to the consideration of the devout reader of the prophets, is this, *that the historical and prophetic writings of the old Testament do mutually support and verifie each other; and both of them*
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afford us an undeniable proof of God's universal providence.

This observation I have briefly touch'd upon already (b), and now I shall illustrate and confirm it by instancing in several particulars. We find for example, the captivity of the ten tribes clearly foretold by *Hosea* (c), *Amos* (d), and *Isaiab* (e), at a considerable distance of time before that calamity came upon them. The seventy years captivity of the two remaining tribes by *Nebuchadnezzar* is as plainly foretold by *Jeremiab* (f) and their restauration under *Cyrus* by *Isaiab* (g); the exact accomplishment of which prophecies is taken notice of by the sacred writers, who liv'd several years after these predictions were made (b).

No less remakable is the succession of the four great monarchies fore-

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| (b) Chap. i. | (c) Hof. ix. 3. x. 5. xi. 5. |
| xiii. 16. | (d) Amos v. 27. vi. 14. vii. 11. |
| (e) Isa. vii. 8. | (f) Jer. xxv. 12. xxix. 10. |
| (g) Isa. xliv. 28. | (b) 2 Chr. xxxvi. 22. Ezra. |
| i. 1. | |

told

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told by *Daniel* (*i*), and particularly the wonderful successes of *Alexander*, together with the division of his monarchy into four kingdoms (*k*); the state of the two principal divisions of that empire, under the kings of *Syria* and *Egypt* (*l*), the alliances they should make with each other, and the small success which these alliances should have toward the ending the differences between them: And to name no more particulars, the profanation of the temple under *Antiochus Epiphanes*, one of those kings. All which particulars were so punctually foretold by *Daniel* above three hundred years before several of them came to pass, that *Porphyry* (*m*), a most bitter enemy to Christianity, had no other way to evade the force of this argument for the truth of the Scriptures, but by asserting that the book of *Daniel* was forg'd after

(*i*) Dan. ii. 39, 40. and Ch. vii. viii. 4, 22. and Ch. xi. 3, 4. (*k*) Dan. xi. 5, &c. (*l*) Vid. Hieron. Pref. in Dan.

the times of *Antiochus Epiphanes*. An absurd and groundless conceit! since 'tis certain, that the whole body of the *old Testament* writings was translated into *Greek* before the time of *Antiochus*; so that it would have been a very easy matter to discover any forgery of this kind. Besides that, it appears by the testimony of *Josephus* (n), (and the story, as it is there related, has several circumstances which sufficiently attest the truth of it) that the *Jews* shew'd this very prophecy to *Alexander the Great*, as he pass'd through their country, and thereupon obtained several privileges and immunities from him.

These, and several other prophecies, carrying along with them such an undeniable evidence of their truth, and divine original, will afford many useful remarks to the attentive and devout readers.

(n) *Antiq.* l. 11. c. viii.

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1. They warrant the accomplishment of those parts of the prophetic writings which remain yet to be fulfill'd ; forasmuch as both the plain and the obscure prophecies were utter'd by the same Spirit, and particularly the *Revelation* in the *new Testament*, takes the *old Testament* prophecies, chiefly those of *Daniel*, for it's platform and groundwork.

2. Those prophecies which immediately concern the *Jewish* state, prove that there was a particular providence always attending that nation ; and they are an evident accomplishment of those judgments which were denounced against that people in the law of *Moses*, whenever they should depart from the worship and service of the true God.

3. They are a sensible proof of God's universal providence, and an evident demonstration that the eternal mind comprehends the whole series of causes and effects at one
single

single view, sees through all the intricate turnings and windings of human counsels, and over-rules and conducts them to what end he pleases. *I am God, and there is none like me*, saith he, in the prophet, (o) *declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.* The signal accomplishment of several prophecies utter'd many ages beforehand, opens our minds and lets us into that noble contemplation, how God carries on one steady and uniform design without being interrupted by those many changes and chances which are in the world, and that confusion and disorder which appears among second causes. It convinces us that his infinite wisdom does unerringly foresee the most distant and casual events, and makes them all subser-

(o) Isa. xlv. 10.

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vient to the carrying on the great ends of providence. That God by his almighty power is able to bring good out of evil, as he did light out of darkness at the beginning of the creation, and to make the rage and fury, the malice and *fierceness of men to turn to his praise*, and his enemies themselves become instrumental in promoting his glory: According to the observation of the wise man, (p) *Thy wisdom, O Lord, reaches from one end to another mightily, and sweetly doth she order all things.*

4. It follows from hence in the fourth place, that the most obscure parts of the prophetic writings ought not to be dispis'd, as if they were altogether uselefs. For though we should suppose them of no use to the Church at present, yet they may be useful to after-times; and *what they mean, tho' we know not*

(p) Wisd. viii. 1.

now

now, yet we may know hereafter
 But besides this, even from the obscurest prophecies we may learn this important truth, that the designs of providence reach from one age to another, and some greater lines of it run through many ages; in all which time there is one design pursu'd with infinite turnings and great variety of wisdom, all the particular occurrences being directed by a steady and unerring counsel to some glorious conclusion, and that with a particular regard to the good of the Church, the point wherein all the great lines of providence do meet as in their center.

And perhaps this is the best use that persons of ordinary capacities can make of the darker prophecies; and 'tis not only a rash undertaking for any to venture the fathoming those deep things of God, without the necessary helps of learning, and *being able to compare spiritual things with spiritual*; but it is like-

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wise apt to lead such persons into great and dangerous mistakes. So that it highly concerns every one to *think soberly of himself, according to that measure of faith (q)* and knowledge which God hath given him, and *not to be too curious in unnecessary matters, nor search out things that are above their strength (r).*

But there are several practical truths of great use for the governing men's lives, which may be learnt from the obscurer books of the prophets, without undertaking to unfold the particular events therein foretold, or to decypher the persons there describ'd. For example, the *Revelation* may upon many accounts be reckoned one of the obscurest books of all the prophetical writings; but yet without venturing upon a particular explication of the several visions of it, an ordinary reader may receive great edification from those

(q) Rom. xii. 3.

(r) Eccclus. iii. 21, 23.
noble

noble hymns offer'd up there to God and Christ (*s*), and may likewise discover very useful truths frequently recommended in it; such as the adoration of the one supreme God in opposition to all creature-worship (*t*); the relying upon the merits of Christ only for pardon, sanctification and salvation (*u*); that we ought to wait patiently for Christ's *appearing and his kingdom*, and in an earnest expectation of it, to continue stedfast in the profession of the true faith, and practice of sincere holiness, notwithstanding all the sufferings that may attend a good conscience (*x*). And tho' every ordinary reader should not rashly undertake to determine who *Antichrist* is, that is there describ'd; yet every one may certainly be inform'd from several passages of

(*s*) Rev. iv. 8, 11. v. 9, 10, 12, 13. vii. 12. xv. 3, 4.

(*t*) Rev. ix. 20. xiv. 7. xxi. 8. xxii. 15.

(*u*) Rev. v. 9. vii. 14. xii. 11. xiii. 18.

(*x*) Rev. ii. 3, 10, 26. xiii. 10. xiv. 12, 13. xvi. 15.

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that book, of those marks and characters of him, which it most nearly concerns us to take notice of, *viz.* pride and ambition, and an affectation of worldly pomp and grandeur (*y*), a cruel and persecuting temper (*z*), and such as seeks to reduce others rather by force and compulsion, than by reason and argument; the love of ease and softness, and a careless and luxurious life (*a*): and that whoever are guilty of these things, they are so far departed from the true Spirit of Christianity. And surely he that takes warning from the plain and frequent admonitions of this book to avoid these sins, has not wholly lost his labour in reading it, and withal has intitled himself to the *blessing* which is pronounced upon those *who keep the sayings of it* (*b*).

(*y*) Rev. xiii. 7. xvii. 4.

(*z*) Rev. ix. 21. xi. 7. xiii. 7, 10, 15, 17. xvi. 6. xvii. 6. xviii. 20, 24. xix. 2. (*a*) Rev. iii. 3. xviii. 3, 7, 9, 12, &c.

(*b*) Rev. i. 3. xxii. 7.

These

These uses persons of ordinary capacities may make even of the obscurest parts of the prophetical writings ; but I am persuaded that God intended men of better talents should reap greater benefit from a sober and devout search into them : and that as a reward of their thirst after divine truth, he often admits such persons *within the veil*, and gives them the *key of knowledge* wherewith to unlock those sacred treasures of God's hidden counsels. However that be, this one thing is a sufficient reward of their labour, that they have the satisfaction of observing the exact harmony and correspondence that is to be found between the several *symbols* and *figurative expressions*, which are made use of in divers parts of those mysterious writings : which amounts to a demonstration, that the prophets were not under illusions of an enthusiastic heat, or roving imagination, but had always some certain views which guided and influenced

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their pen. Accordingly they often word their prophecies with a critical niceness of expression, (a remarkable instance of which may be seen, *Rev.* xii. 3. compared with *Chap.* xiii. 1.) and the *emblems* and figures which they make use of are as capable of being reduc'd under rules, as the terms of any art or science whatsoever.

II. Another particular very observable in those prophecies, which relate to the times of the Messias, is the *mystical sense* of several passages in them contained under the literal; of which we may assign several examples. As, 1. when the prophets describe the Messias under such characters as have a more immediate aspect upon some eminent person in or near their own times (*c*). 2. When they represent the redemption of mankind, which he was to accomplish, by such expressions as do in

(*c*) See 2 Sam. vii. 14. Psal. ii. 6, 7. Psal. xlv. & lxxii. lxxxix. 26, 27. Hagg. ii. 23. Zech. vi. 11, 12.

their

their first and primary sense, allude to some temporal deliverance which God had (*d*), or would vouchsafe to their own nation (*e*). Or, *lastly*, when they set forth the benefits of the Gospel by phrases taken from the forms of divine worship prescribed by their law (*f*).

Any one that carefully reads the prophets, will quickly be convinc'd, that the views which they had of future events, reach'd a great way beyond their own times; and were not confin'd to the narrow limits of their own nation. I shall prove this by two plain instances, out of many that might be alledged.

We will allow that the wonderful restoration of the *Jewish* captivity, and their return into their own land, might be the ground-work, of all those predictions concerning the

(*d*) See Psal. lxxviii. 22, 23.

(*e*) See Isa. xl. 3, &c. xlix. 8, &c. lii. 7, &c. liv. 1, &c. lx. 1, &c.

(*f*) See Isa. ii. 1. lxvi. 20, 23. Zech. xiv. 16, 20.

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flourishing state of the Church, which we find foretold by *Isaiab* with a very pompous eloquence, from the 40th chapter to the end of his prophecy. But none can say, that all these glorious promises could in any tolerable sense be accomplish'd in those poor remains of God's chosen people, or those inconsiderable successes which they afterward obtain'd under the *Maccabees* against their enemies: when their condition at best, was nothing near so prosperous as it had formerly been in the days of *David* and *Solomon*. So that we can't maintain the truth of so considerable a part of the *Old Testament*, prophecy, but by asserting, that the prophet was carry'd on from his first subject to a more agreeable prospect of the enlargement of the Church under the Gospel, and perhaps foresaw a more flourishing state of it than the world hath yet been bless'd with.

A second proof of this point shall be taken from those prophecies of
Isaiab

Isaiab and *Jeremiab*, which foretel the destruction of *Babylon* (g); and they both describe it as a decisive stroke which should thoroughly vindicate the cause of oppressed truth and innocence (b), and should put a final period to idolatry (i), and to the miseries and afflictions of God's people (k).

None can with any shew of probability pretend, that any of these ends were attain'd by the overthrow of the *Babylonian* monarchy by *Cyrus*. For neither was *Babylon* itself destroy'd till a considerable time after; nor did that great turn of affairs give any remarkable check to idolatry. For the *Persians* were as great strangers to the true God, as the *Babylonians*; this was the only

(g) See *Isa.* xiii. 19, 20. *Jer.* l. 39, 40. li. 64.

(b) See *Isa.* xiv. 1, 2, &c. *Jer.* l. 34. li. 11, 35, 36.

(i) See *Isa.* xxi. 8. xlv. 16. *Jer.* l. 2, 38. li. 17, 18, 44, 47.

(k) See *Jer.* l. 4, 5, 19, 20.

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difference between them, that the *Persians* did not worship images (1), but contented themselves with representing the Divine Majesty by the external symbol of fire, or it may be worshipped him in some other of the elements. From whence we may conclude that these prophets had some further event in their view, and took occasion from that remarkable judgment of God upon the *Babylonish* monarchy, the great enemy and oppressor of God's people, to give some general hints of the great downfall of *Antichrist*, the last and finishing stroke of the divine vengeance which shall be inflicted upon the adversaries of God's Church and truth, as it is more fully describ'd by St *John* in his *Revelation*.

(1) Πέρσαι ἀγάλματα καὶ βωμὸς ἐκ ἰδρύον-
ται. Strab. l. 15. *De Persis* Ἐ Medis eadem habet.
Clem. Alex. Protrept. p. 43. A. Ἀγάλματα μὲν
θεῶν ἐ ξύλα καὶ λίθους ὑπειλήφασιν, ὥσπερ
Ἕλληνες — ἀλλὰ πῦρ τε καὶ ὕδωρ ὡς φιλό-
σοφοι. Μετὰ πολλὰς μέντοι ὕστερον περιόδους
ἐλθὼν ἀνθρωποειδῆ ἀγάλματα σέβειν αὐτὰς Βη-
ρωσσὸς ἐν τρίτῃ χαλδαικῶν παρίσινσι.

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That a great part of the prophetic writings have a mystical sense involved under a literal one, is a point generally agreed both by the *Jews* and Christians. When Christ and his Apostles explain'd the prophecies of the *Old Testament* in this manner, we don't find that the *Jews* contradicted the notion in general, or charged them with misapplying the particular texts which they alledg'd, as if they did not relate to the times of the Messias. So both parties agreed in this (m), that all the remarkable occurrences of former times were figures of that which should come to pass in the *latter days*. Accordingly we find that the Apostles not only argued against the *Jews*, from the plain predictions of the prophets, but likewise from the rites and ordinances of the *Jewish* worship (n), as types and figures of the times of the Mes-

(m) See Dr *Allix*, against the Unitar. c. 2. & 3.

(n) See Heb. viii. 5. ix. 8, 18.

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fias, and do further take it for granted, that all the eminent persons of foregoing ages, and the remarkable passages of their lives, did bear some resemblance or representation (o) of *him that was to come*. They suppose that the preferring *Isaac* before *Ishmael*, and *Jacob* before *Esau*, did prefigure the rejection of the *Jews*, and the calling of the *Gentiles* (p) : they draw a parallel between the state of the *Israelites* in the wilderness, and the condition of Christians during their pilgrimage in this world (q) And to pass by many other instances, we may observe that several expressions in the *Revelation* allude to the *Egyptian* bondage (r) ; to the apostacy of the ten tribes begun by *Jeroboam*, and increased by the wicked kings who succeeded him (s), to the *Baby-*

(o) See Heb. ii. 12, 13.

(p) Rom. ix. 6, &c. (q) Heb. iii, & iv. 1 Cor. x. 1, &c.

(r) Revel. xi. 6, 8. xii. 6. xv. 3. xvi. 2, 3, 4.

(s) Ibid. ch. ii. 20. xi. 3, 5, 6. Chap. xiv. 8. xviii. 2, 4, &c.

lonish

lonish captivity, and to the taking away of many *Jews* in the time of *Antiochus Epiphanes* (t). As so many *preludia*, or forerunners of the days of *Antichrist*, (who is likewise describ'd under the characters of the idolatrous governments, and persecuting princes mentioned in the *Old Testament*) (u), and of the grand apostacy which *St Paul* foretold (x) should break out, and which that prophecy doth more particulary describe.

These *providential congruities* between the times of the *Old* and *New Testament*, as a learned writer styles them, do very much confirm the authority of both Testaments. From hence we learn that the Scriptures comprehend one entire scene of providence which reaches from one end of the world to the other : and that God, who is the beginning

(t) Chap. xi. 2. xiii. 5.

(u) See Chap. xiii. & xviii.

(x) 2 Theff. ii. 3.

and

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and end of all things, by various steps and degrees pursues one great design, *viz.* The setting up the kingdom of his Son, thro' the several ages of the world, and will still carry it on by such measures as seem best to his infinite wisdom, till the great day of the consummation of all things. Such a gradual opening this wonderful scene of providence, is a new argument of that infinite wisdom which contrived it, and so fully justifies this mystical way of propounding it.

Several other considerations may be offer'd that justify the wisdom of God's conduct in fore-shewing the times of the new covenant under the types and figures of the old.

I. It was necessary that the prophecies relating to the Gospel, and the spiritual benefits thereof, should be deliver'd to the *Jews* under the emblems of temporal blessings, and such representations as would appear most glorious in their apprehensions

hensions (y) in order to recommend them more powerfully to their carnal minds, and worldly affections. Whereas if the nature of Christ's kingdom had been set forth plainly by the prophets, as it was in itself, they would have received the promises but coldly, and had but a faint desire to see them accomplish'd. 'Twas the earthly kingdom of the Messias which they set their hearts upon; this raised in their minds an earnest expectation of the *Redeemer of Israel*, and made them such zealous preservers of those holy records, which gave them a title to that glorious promise: whereas if the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom had been clearly fore-shew'd, if the prophets had plainly discover'd that the *Gentiles* were to be *fellow-heirs* with the *Jews*, and *partakers of the same promises*, they would in all probability have slighted and rejected the

(y) *Loquitur Propheta Figuris, quæ suæ conveniunt ætati*: Calvin. in Is. lvi. 7.

prophecies

prophecies concerning the Messias, as they did Christ himself when he appear'd.

2. It was requisite that the times of the Gospel should be foretold with some degree of obscurity, and couch'd under veils and figures, because the *Jews* themselves were to be instruments in bringing about the work of man's redemption by the death and sufferings of the Messias: which if it had been clearly foretold, the prophecies would have defeated their own accomplishment, and we can't suppose, humanly speaking, that the *Jews* when they were thus forewarn'd would have had a hand in *crucifying their king*, and despitefully using him that was the hope, the expectation, and the *glory of Israel*: whereas *because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets, they fulfilled them in condemning him*, as St Paul tells them (z).

(z) Acts xiii. 27.

3. The

3. The veil drawn over the prophecies, is very serviceable to that wonderful conduct of providence, in appointing the *Jews* to be witnesses and conservators of those very prophecies which shew the unreasonableness of their unbelief. They carry the Christians books and evidences for them, as St *Austin* (a) acutely observ'd, and God hath therefore dispersed them over the world, that they might bear witness to that truth which they themselves refuse to acknowledge, whilst they continue zealous assertors of those divine oracles, which prove that our Jesus, whom they deny, is the very Christ. O God, *how wonderful art thou in thy works! thro' the greatness of thy power shall thy enemies become liars unto thee* (b), and stand condemned out of their own mouths.

III. A third particular which I would desire the pious reader to ob-

(a) In Psalm lviii. (lix. secund. Hebr.) & alibi.

(b) Psalm lxvi. 3.

serve,

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serve, in the writings of the prophets, (and which is that part of them that is best suited to common capacities) is that *holy zeal wherewith they reprove the vices of the times they lived in*, and those pathetic exhortations, whereby they persuade sinners to amend their ways, and break off their sins by a sincere repentance. Here they give us a true pattern of that courage and constancy, that zeal and fervency, wherewith we ought to maintain the cause of religion, when they rebuke the vices of the great ones, as well as of the meanest, without fear or flattery; when they reprove great and heinous offences, with an awful authority, with great severity against sin, and yet great compassion towards sinners: and exhort them to repent, and turn to God, by all the powerful persuasives of an holy eloquence. *First beseeching them by the mercies of God*, by all that he has done for them, by the obligations he has laid
upon

upon them, and the right that he has to their service : recounting his past favours towards them, and renewing his gracious promises for the time to come : and if these gentle methods will not prevail with sinners, they then represent to them the greatness of God's majesty, the dread of his power, the fierceness of his anger, their own monstrous ingratitude and incorrigibleness, in abusing his mercies, despising his judgments, resisting his Spirit, and rendring ineffectual all those methods which divine wisdom itself could make use of, to recover sinners from the error of their ways. These discourses verify that saying of the prophet *Jeremiah* (c), that *God's Word* in the mouth of his prophets *is as a fire*, which makes it's way thro' all opposition, *and like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces* ; is able to subdue the most obdurate heart, if

(c) Jer. xxiii. 29.

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it it be seriously attended to, and to beat down the confidence of the most daring offender.

We may farther observe, that these moral discourses of the prophets, favour very much of a true and evangelical spirit of piety and holiness. They exhort men not to lay too much stress upon the practical observance of the ceremonial law (*d*), but to *fulfil the righteousness* chiefly intended by it, *in walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*. The *Jews* think that the chief strength of their cause lies in this point, that God himself has declared that the law of *Moses* should be of perpetual obligation. But these discourses of the prophets afford an unanswerable confutation to this their pretence. For there we see the prophets themselves, who liv'd under the law, shewing men a more excellent way of pleasing God, than by the for-

(*d*) Isa. i. 11. lxvi. 3. Jerem. vii. 21, 22, 23. Hos. vi. 6. Amos v. 21. Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8.

mal acts of an external obedience, and plainly foretelling (*e*) that the *Mosaic* covenant should at last give way to a better, which I come in the next place to consider.

(*e*) Jer. xxxi. 31.



C H A P. VIII.

*Observations upon the Gospels, in order
to the more useful reading that part
of Holy Scripture.*

I Proceed to discourse of the particular uses we are to make of the writings of the *New Testament*, as 'tis commonly call'd, because the benefits therein contain'd are convey'd to us by the death of Christ, who has as it were bequeathed them to us in this his last will and testament. But the title of those books might more properly be translated the *new covenant* (a), as it is distinguish'd from the former *covenant*, which God made with the *Jews*, by the ministry and mediation of *Moses*.

(a) Διαθήκη.

That

That was a law, taking the word in it's proper sense, requiring strict obedience under severe penalties: Or a *covenant of works*, denouncing an irreverfible curse upon those who did not continue in an exact obedience to all the duties therein commanded (b). Whereas the *new covenant* is a *covenant of grace*, and thereupon is call'd *the gift of grace and abundance of grace* (c), because it makes merciful allowances for the unavoidable frailties of human nature, and sets forth Christ to be a propitiation for the fins of all those who truly repent, and endeavour to please a sincere, tho' imperfect obedience. *The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ* (d): The Gospel is there called *grace* in opposition to the severity of the law, which denounc'd judgment against great offences without mercy; and *truth*,

(b) Deut. xxvii. 26.

(c) Rom. v. 15, 17.

(d) John i. 17.

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whereby it is distinguish'd from the figures of the law, which was but a *shadow of good things to come* (e).

I have already observ'd (f), that the books of the *Old Testament* give two different schemes or representations of the *Jewish* religion ; and according to those different views of it, St *Paul* gives very different characters of that institution. Sometimes he calls the law spiritual (g), at other times he styles it (h) a *carnal commandment*. The ambiguity of the word Νόμος, as it is taken for the *Jewish* law under it's several acceptations, is, I conceive, a principal cause of the obscurity of St *Paul's* discourses upon the subject of justification, and of the many different opinions, which have been advanc'd concerning that point. It seems most probable that the word Law, as it is oppos'd in the *New Testament* to

(e) Heb. x. 1. (f) Supr. chap. iv. (g) Rom. vii. 14. (h) Hebr. vii. 16.

the Gospel, usually signifies that system of laws and ordinances, which were the terms of the *covenant* made with the *Jews* at mount *Sinai* (i) : Especially as their extent and obligation was understood and explain'd in the time of Christ and the Apostles, both by the dictates of the *Jewish Rabbies*, and the concurring practice of the people (k). These were a body of laws chiefly intended for the government of that common-wealth; which according to the nature of all political laws, laid a greater stress upon the outward act of obedience, than the inward sincerity of the mind : It was rather design'd as a restraint to the *lawless and disobedient*, than as a rule of perfection to the *righteous* (l) : It did not expressly promise any internal assistances (m), nor future rewards (n), nor did it of-

(i) See Acts xv. 5. Galat. iii. 17. Rom. iii. 19.
 (k) See Rom. ix. 32. x. 3. Matth. v. 20. & ch. xv. 11, 12. (l) 1 Tim. i. 9. Gal. iii. 19. (m) See Rom. iv. 4. & ch. xi. 6. (n) V. Heb. vii. 19. viii. 6.

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fer any method of propitiation for great and presumptuous offences. In which respects the Apostle saith, that the *law was weak through the flesh* (o), that it *was the strength of sin* (p), that it *could not justify* (q) *nor give life* (r), that the *Jews were in the flesh* (s), in a carnal state, and *trusted in the flesh* (t), in fleshly privileges (u) and *carnal ordinances* (x): That the law was a *dead letter* (y), whereas the Gospel was *spirit and life* (z): That it *worketh wrath* (a), that it involves those that rely upon it *under a curse* (b), that it was *weak and unprofitable* (c), *made nothing perfect*, nor could attain the end which the zealous contenders for it proposed to themselves, *i. e.* It could neither justify them here, nor save them hereafter. Taking the *law* in the

(o) Rom. viii. 3. (p) 1 Cor. xv. 56. (q) Rom. iii. 20. Gal. ii. 16. (r) Gal. iii. 21. (s) Rom. vii. v. (t) Phil. iii. 3. (u) Ibid. v. 5, 6. (x) Heb. ix. 10. (y) Rom. vii. 5, 6. (z) Rom. viii. 2. 2 Cor. iii. 6. (a) Rom. iv. 15. (b) Gal. iii. 10. (c) Heb. vii. 18, 19.

fore-

foremention'd sense, we may give a satisfactory account why the Apostle speaks of it in such undervaluing terms; and may easily assign the reason why he excludes *works* from having any relation to our justification. And the famous prophecy of *Jeremy*, where (d) he states the difference between the *old* and *new covenant*, does very much confirm this interpretation. There he expressly calls the *former covenant*, that which God *made with our fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt*; and then reckons up the advantages which the *new covenant* should have above it; wherein God promises that he *would put his laws into their inward parts, and write them in their hearts*; i. e. He would require inward purity instead of external obedience, and a reasonable service in the place of carnal ordinances, and would put his spirit within them to

(d) Jer. xxxi. 31.

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enable them to perform their duty heartily and sincerely. It follows, *I will be their God, and they shall be my people, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more; i. e.* God would set forth Christ to be a perfect propitiation for sins to all those that truly repent and turn from their evil ways, and thereby assure them of his favour and loving kindness, and that nothing shall separate them from an interest in his love. This is that second and better covenant, as St Paul calls it (e), of which Christ is the Mediator: *Establish'd upon better Promises, viz. (f)* the clearer revelation of a future state, and more plentiful effusion of the divine grace (g), than was granted under the law: And consisting of more excellent precepts, and those recommended to our practice by the most engaging motives, such as are taken

(e) Heb. viii. 6, 7. (f) 2 Tim. i. 10. (g) See Isa. xlv. 3. liv. 13. Ezek. xi. 19. xxxvi. 27. Joel ii. 28. Joh. vii. 39. Gal. iii. 2. Ephes. i. 13.

from

from this consideration, that the Son of God *came down from heaven, that he might give life unto the world* (b).

These *glad tidings of peace and salvation* which the Gospel brings unto us, for our comfort and instruction, are delivered to us in the writings of the Apostles and holy pen-men of the *New Testament*, to whose words we ought to give the *most earnest heed* and attention; for *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirm'd to us by them that heard him* (i)?

The usefulness of which writings I come now to consider, and shall divide them into two sorts. 1. The Gospels which contain the history of our Lord's life and doctrine; and 2. The Acts and Epistles, which give us an account of the preaching

(b) John vi. 33.

(i) Heb. ii. 3.

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of the Apostles, and the manner how
they propagated Christianity in the
world.

In discoursing upon the first head,
I shall in the first place consider the
principal matters contain'd in the
Gospels, and then the manner how
they are deliver'd.

The principal matters contain'd
in the Gospels may be reduced
to these four heads. 1. Our Lord's
doctrine. 2. His miracles. 3. His
manner of life, and 4. The circum-
stances of his death.

1. Our Lord's doctrine. He came
down from Heaven to shew us the
way thither, to *bring us from dark-
ness to light, and from the power of
Satan to God*: To instruct us in the
knowledge of the true God, and the
means whereby we might approve
ourselves to him. And this he did
two ways; more plainly and openly
in his sermons and other discourses;
more obscurely and reservedly in his
parables.

Of

Of all his discourses, that which I shall chiefly take notice of is, that glorious, full and admirable sermon which he deliver'd upon the mount, and is contained in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of St *Matthew*. This divine discourse comprehends in it the very marrow and quintessence of Christianity, and ought to be the daily subject of every good Christian's reading and meditation, till he has copied it into his life and conversation.

The great design of our Saviour in this sermon, is to exhort us to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit*; to bring forth the fruits of righteousness out of a pure conscience: To purifie our hearts from all corrupt affections, as those that would approve themselves to that God whose property 'tis to search the heart, and who knows the most secret thoughts and desires that lie lurking in the retired corners of it.

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And that men might not satisfy themselves with saying that their heart is right toward God, he further teaches us, that we must testify the sincerity of our inward dispositions by bringing forth the visible fruits of good works, just as the life and goodness of the tree is known by it's fruit: That we must demonstrate the reality of our inward love toward God, by real acts of mercy and charity to our brethren: That we must shew all kindness to all men, and do injury to none; that we must not *render evil for evil*, but *love our enemies, and do good to them that hate us*, in imitation of our heavenly Father, who is the most glorious instance of free bounty, of unwearied patience, and of unconfined mercy.

In short the great aim of this, and all our Saviour's discourses is, to give men a true notion of *pure and undefiled religion*; and to preserve it from those two cankers which are
apt

apt to eat out the very life and heart of it, which are *hypocirisy* and *spiritual pride*. Those were the reigning sins of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, whereby they had corrupted the very vitals of the *Jewish* religion, and which rendred all their high pretences to godliness of none effect, and unserviceable to any of the true ends of religion.

To prevent mens being guilty of hypocrisy, our Saviour often puts them in mind that *God is a Spirit, and they that serve him, must worship him in spirit and in truth* (k): That the true way to make the *outside* of the cup clean, is to wash the *inside* first (l): That we must not content ourselves with appearing righteous (m) in the eyes of the world, nor greedily seek the praise of men, but that which comes from God (n), the most righteous and uncorrupt judge, by

(k) Joh. iv. 24. (l) Mat. xxiii. 26. (m) Ibid. ver. 28. (n) John v. 44.

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whose sentence we must stand or fall, and who alone is *able to save and to destroy*.

Nor was he less industrious to check the beginnings of spiritual pride, a subtle and dangerous enemy, which very often lurks under the disguise of mortification and renouncing, of the world. Pride indeed was always detested as an unreasonable and unseemly vice, but yet the world was never taught the true lesson of humility, 'till our Saviour came to instruct it. The foundation of Christianity is laid in that divine truth (o) *that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance*, as the Apostle truly styles it (p): A saying more valuable than whole volumes of philosophy and human wisdom, which both discovers our distemper, and directs us

(o) See John iii. 16. Matth. xviii. 11.

(p) 1 Tim. i. 15.

where

where to find a cure. How different from this self-denying maxim were the notions of the philosophers? among whom no principle was more current than this, *that virtue and happiness were in mens own power* (q). They that were of this opinion could have but little sense of the inbred corruption of human nature, and they who were not sensible that they were sick, would not be very forward to seek out for a physician. Their wise man had *no need of repentance* (r), and consequently

(q) 'Tis true that the Philosophers did sometimes, when they spoke more correctly, acknowledge *divine assistances*, as hath been shew'd by learned men, particularly by Mr Dodwell, *Prolegom. ad lib. D. Stearn. de obstinatione Sect. 55, 56.* But the general strain of their writings takes no notice of any such thing, and the common readers understood the expressions they use concerning self-sufficiency, in a sense exclusive of it, as appears by that noted expression of *Horace, Lib. 1. Ep. xviii.*

Hoc satis est orare Jovem —

Det vitam, det opes, æquum animum ipse parabo.

(r) *Sapiens nihil facit quod non debet, nihil prætermittit quod debet. Senec. de Clement. l. 2. c. 7.*

was

was not under any apprehension of *the wrath to come*. As he did not place his happiness in God, so neither did he lift up his soul to him. He was willing to believe that *virtue was its own reward*, and made use of this specious shew of present satisfaction, only to hide his distrust of a future reward (s).

These were some of the great attainments of the Heathen philosophers, or rather *great swelling words of vanity*, which their pride suggested to them, utterly void of truth and soberness. Whereas the great

(s) *Socrates* himself speak very doubtfully of this matter, in his *apology*, whose words are thus translated by *Cicero*, *Tusc. Quæst. l. i. Tempus est jam hinc abire me, ut moriar, vos ut vitam agatis: utrum autem sit melius Dii immortales sciunt: hominem quidem scire arbitror neminem*. Nor does *Tully* in that place, or in his book *de Senectute* speak with greater assurance. *Seneca* labours under the same uncertainty, as will appear to any that compare the places where he asserts the soul's immortality, with his 54th *Epistle* and 19th *Cb. de Consolat. ad Marciam*. Even *Antoninus* himself could come to no resolution in this point. See l. 4. n. 13. Edit. Oxon.

design

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design of all our Saviour's instructions was to exalt God, and to humble man. To this end he taught men (t) that they were naturally slaves to sin and error, that he was *come a light into the world, that whosoever believes in him should not abide in darkness* (u) : That by his dying for them (x) he was to redeem them from the power of sin, and the wages of it, death eternal ; and by his living in them (y) he was to enable them to *bring forth fruit unto holiness, the end of which would be everlasting life*. He instructs us not to be proud of our spiritual attainments, that when we have done our best, still we ought to say, *we are unprofitable servants* (z) : Forasmuch as all our righteousness is but *as filthy rags*, and our best actions have so great an alloy of sin and imperfection, that they cannot be ac-

(t) John iii. 6. (u) John xii. 46. (x) Matth. xx. 28. John vi. 51. (y) John xiv. 19. xv. 4, 5. (z) Luke xvii. 10.

ceptable to so holy and pure a being as God almighty is, but only thro' the all-sufficient merits of his Son, *in whom alone he is well pleased.*

To conclude this point, the sum of our Saviour's preaching consists in inculcating this one great and fundamental truth of Christianity, that *we are nothing, and God is all in all*; 'tis his word that enlightens our minds, his Spirit directs our wills, his providence orders our affairs, his grace guides us here, and his mercy must bring us to heaven hereafter. So that if we will needs glory, we must *glory only in the Lord*, we must acknowledge that all good things come from him, and nothing is truly valuable but what renders us accepted with him.

These discourses shew that the author of them *knew what was in man*, was perfectly acquainted with all the weaknesses and infirmities of his constitution, and understood how to apply suitable remedies

medies to his most prevailing distempers.

Thus I have endeavour'd briefly to represent the great aim and tendency of our Saviour's doctrine, and shew'd how much it exceeds the highest attainments of human wisdom, because it teaches us to know God and ourselves, to *give him the honour which is due unto his name*, and to humble ourselves before him, as sinful dust and ashes.

I proceed to take a short view of our Saviour's *parables*, and shew the great usefulness of them.

It was the custom of the wise men among the ancients to cloath their instructions in apt stories and suitable comparisons: Such is the parable of *Jotham* (*a*), and that very apposite one of *Nathan* to *David* (*b*); this they did at once to please and to instruct, to excite mens attention by gratifying their curiosity,

(*a*) Judg. ix. 8. (*b*) 2 Sam. xii. 1.

and to quicken their memory by entertaining their fancy. Our Saviour took this method to recommend his weighty instructions, and make them sink deeper into the minds of his auditors. The same method was likewise very proper for another purpose, *viz.* to deliver the mysteries of the Gospel with some degree of obscurity and reserve ; which he did both to excite mens industry in searching further into the deep things of God, and withal to punish the sloth and negligence of those who grudge taking any pains to learn God's will and their own duty. This reason you may find our Saviour himself assigns why he spake to the multitude in parables, *Matth.* xiii. 10, &c. These were the reasons why our Saviour chose to convey his instructions in parables. And we may observe in general concerning them, first that they have a pleasing variety suited to mens different apprehensions and capacities, and in the
next

next place that there is an extraordinary decency, and if I may so express it, a *genteelness*, which runs through them all. Our Saviour puts the case in all his parables on the charitable side, and makes the most favourable representation of things which the matter will bear. In the parable of the *ten virgins* (c), he supposes the number of the wise to be equal to that of the foolish. In the parable of the *lost sheep* (d), he supposes but one of an hundred to go astray : And yet the *good shepherd* is content to leave all the rest, and go in quest after that single straggler. In the third place there is an exact *decorum* observ'd in all Christ's parables, and every thing that is spoken is fitted to the character of the person who speaks it : A beauty which the critics (e) look upon as the greatest ornament of a poem, and

(c) Mat. xxv. 2. (d) Luke xv. 4. (e) Si Plausoris eges—Ætatis cujusque notandi sunt tibi mores. *Horat. Art. Poet. v. 154. etiam v. 319.*
which

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which of it's self is sufficient to make it heard, or read with delight and admiration: And therefore, I hope, it may recommend our Saviour's parables to the nice and delicate taste of our modern wits, who are apt to think every thing in Scripture so mean and flat, as not to be worth their reading.

Thus much we observe in general concerning our Saviour's parables: Let us now take a brief view of some of the more remarkable ones.

To begin with the parable of the *(f)* *prodigal*: In what lively colours *(g)* doth our Saviour there describe the follies and madness of an extravagant course of life, and the hardships and miseries it usually betrays men to; how repentance is a man's *coming to himself* *(h)* again, and first of all returning to his own right senses, and then

(f) Luke xi. 11, &c.

(g) *Inter omnes Christi parabolas hæc sane eximia est, plena affectuum, & vividis picta coloribus.* Grot. ad v. 20. *(h)* v. 17.

to

to God and his duty. And yet notwithstanding the inexcusableness of such transgressions, how ready our heavenly Father is to receive those that return to him, tho' after a long course of disobedience, and how willing to pardon their heinous and repeated provocations.

The parable that follows in the next chapter of the *rich man and Lazarus*, represents to us with very affecting circumstances how apt a plentiful fortune is to benumb and stupify the soul, to shut out all serious consideration, to make men unmindful of the wants and necessities of their poor brethren, to regard nothing but the present gratification of their senses, and never *lift up their eyes* to heaven, till they see themselves surrounded with the flames of hell, and irreversibly doomed to take their portion in *that place of torment*.

The parable of the *king that would take an account of his servants* (i) of-

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(i) offers powerful arguments to convince us of the great equity, and indeed necessity of forgiving others, in order to obtain forgiveness ourselves at the hands of God.

The parable of the *good Samaritan* (k) does very appositely shew us that we ought to extend our kindness to all that stand in present need of our help, however differing from us in affections, persuasion, or interest.

The parable of the *rich man, who pleased himself with the prospect of living many years in wealth and jollity* (l), doth exactly represent the carnal security of worldly-minded men, and how terrible the message of death is to such persons, which very often cuts them off with a sudden stroke in the midst of their sins, and blasts all their fond hopes and vain expectations.

(i) Matth. xviii. 23, &c.

(k) Luke. x. 30.

(l) Luke xii. 16.

It would be too large an undertaking to give a particular account of all our Saviour's parables, and therefore I shall only just take notice of those which are put together in the xiiiith chapter of *St Matthew*: The first of which, the parable of the *Sower*, assigns the several reasons which hinder men from receiving any benefit by the many sermons and instructions which they hear; and in those that follow, as also in many others, Christ in a prophetical manner describes the speedy growth and progress of the Christian Religion, and the state of the Church here upon earth unto the end of the world: In all which there are several mysterious admonitions, (not to be discover'd but by a diligent searcher of the Scriptures) both instructing all ranks and orders of Christians in their several duties, and also warning the Church against those errors and corruptions, which should in process of time over-spread it. So
that

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that *Origen* (*m*) with great reason challenges *Celsus*, who despised the plainness of the Scriptures, to explain the parables of our Saviour, and unfold all those mysterious truths which are there couch'd under emblems and figures. And as our Saviour himself vouchsafed to expound some of his parables to his disciples, apart from the multitude, so still there is need of a more intimate converse with the oracles of heaven, to enable us to discover all that spiritual wisdom which is there concealed under sensible representations.

II. The second thing observable in the Gospels, is our Saviour's *miracles*.

I shall not enter into a large discourse concerning the use of miracles, or the marks whereby we may distinguish true miracles from counterfeit ones. I shall only observe that

(*m*) *Orig. cont. Cels. l. 3. p. 122.*

our

our Saviour's *miracles* were not design'd for ostentation, nor meerly to surprize men or gratify their curiosity, but to be really useful and beneficial to mankind ; as if he intended thereby to instruct us, that all power ought to be employ'd to the doing of good, inasmuch as goodness is the most glorious and godlike quality of the divine nature, and that which gives a lustre to omnipotency it self (n). Christ's *miracles* made way for the reception of his doctrine, not only as they were a demonstration, that he who wrought them was a teacher sent from God, but likewise as they were an argument of our Saviour's own affectionate love and kindness to the sons of men, and a pledge and assurance of God's gracious purposes towards them. When he gave sight to the blind, at the same time he open'd the eyes of

(n) *Reddere Diis bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas est.* Senec. Epist. 95.

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their understanding, that they might see *the day-spring from on high* that was come to *visit them*. When he made the deaf to hear, such a work of mercy prepared them to receive with joy the glad tidings of the Gospel. When he cleansed the lepers, it was natural for those that were cured, to conclude that the same person was able to purge them from the pollution of their Sins, and present them without spot to God. So suitable were all Christ's *miracles*, to the great design of his coming into the world, and disposed men to believe that he who was the healer of their bodily infirmities, was best qualified to be the physician of their souls.

And I think without perplexing ourselves with that nice enquiry, what are truly and properly miraculous works? or when must natural powers end, and supernatural begin? this may be sufficient determination of the question, concerning true and false *miracles*, that wherever any extraordinary

traordinary work is wrought in a manner worthy of God, and beneficial to men, agreeing with fundamental truths formerly reveal'd, or confirming some new revelation of God's will, and promoting the great ends of piety and virtue in the world, these are certain marks of a true miracle, and we need no better evidence than this to distinguish God's messengers from impostors.

We may further consider, that the prophets foretold (†) that the Messiah should come with *miracles*, and have instanc'd in the principal kinds of miracles which he wrought. So that here we have God himself bearing witness, by the mouth of his prophets to the truth of our Saviour's miracles, and guarding them from all suspicion of imposture. And thus the miracles of our Lord did not only give testimony to him, as they were wonderful works in themselves, but

(†) See Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.

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likewise as they were an accomplishment of some of those predictions, which went before concerning him. And this must needs be an undeniable argument for the truth of our Saviour's omission, to those that received the (*) writings of the prophets; and those that did not, by comparing these prophecies of the *Old Testament*, with the events recorded in the *New*, might from hence be fully convinced of the divine authority of both.

III. The third particular observable in our reading the Gospel is, *our Saviour's manner of life and conversation*; which was exactly agreeable to his doctrine and precepts.

St *Luke* tells us (o) that the design of his Gospel was to give an account of all that Christ *both did and taught*: implying that he practised first himself what he taught others, and laid

(*) Matth. xi. 5, 6.

(o) Acts i. 1.

no other burdens upon his disciples, but what he willingly underwent himself, and wherein he was their pattern as well as their director.

Humility and a patient submission to God's will; Charity, and a contempt of the world, are the peculiar doctrines of the Christian religion, and never were effectually recommended to the world till that appeared; and our Saviour's life was one entire instance of these eminent virtues.

He made it his *meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him*: he went about doing good, and healing both the bodies and souls of men. He submitted to the lowest offices for the sake of others, and was at every body's service that desir'd his assistance. He condescended to the meanest company, that of Publicans and Sinners, when he had a prospect of doing any good upon them, and was content to lose the reputation of being a good man,

K 3

that

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that he might more effectually serve the ends of piety and goodness (p).

Never did so much goodness meet with such ungrateful and unsuitable returns ; and yet this did not discourage him from going on as he had begun : he still continu'd unwearied in well-doing, endeavouring to conquer mens-malice by kindness, and *overcome evil with good.*

He was the noblest instance of a sincere and unaffected contempt of the world that ever appear'd in it. When he came into the world *he came into his own*, as St *John* speaks (q), he made it, and could easily have commanded all the glories and pleasures of it : yet he *made himself of no reputation*, and took upon him so lowly a disguise, that when *he was in the world, tho' the world were made by him, yet it knew him not.* He

(p) *Boni viri famam perdere, ne conscientiam perderet.* Senec.

(q) John i. 11.

chose to appear in such a mean condition, on purpose to *stain the pride of all worldly glory*, and to convince men that there were things of a quite different nature, namely, the favour of God and the unseen glories of the world to come, that did infinitely more deserve their esteem and regard. And he not only despised the glories of the world, but likewise patiently endured it's affronts and reproaches; and when *he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatned not, but committed his cause to him that judges righteously (r)*; to teach us by his behaviour in all conditions, to have an equal mind both in prosperity and adversity; to value that *honour which comes from God only*, and when we are unjustly dealt with, to comfort ourselves with the testimony of our conscience, and refer all to the righteous judgment of God.

(r) 1 Pet. ii. 22.

This eminent example of a patient continuance in well doing, which appears so conspicuous in every part of our Saviour's life, is of great efficacy to persuade us *to go and do likewise*. It is commonly observ'd, that *Example is of greater force than bare precept*, because it sets forth the beauty of holiness to the life, and inflames men with a holy emulation of imitating those works, which appear so lovely and alluring. Precept indeed lays a higher obligation, and commands with greater authority; but example attracts more strongly, and hath a more powerful art of persuasion; in which respect we may justly say, that precept is but a *dead letter*, in comparison of a *living example*. Especially the example of our Saviour doth powerfully excite us to tread in his steps, since he, as the *captain of our salvation*, hath led the way; and if we follow him here, we shall assuredly reign with him hereafter.

IV. The

IV. The fourth particular, very observable in our reading the Gospels, is *the circumstances of our Saviour's death.*

And here the virtues of humility, charity, and resignation to God's will, which are the particular glories of Christ's life, appear still more eminent and conspicuous. In great humility *he took upon him the form of a servant*, and now he submitted to a servile and ignominious death, and *was numbered among the transgressors.* Out of his fervent charity he spent his life in the service of mankind, and now he laid it down to be a *ransom for many.* He gave the greatest demonstration of his charity, in dying even for his enemies, and offering up his blood, as well as his prayers, to procure a pardon for those that shed it. And received the traiterous kiss of *Judas* with such an unparallell'd meekness, with such a gentle, and yet confounding, reproof, as was sufficient to melt down the malice of

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any one that was capable of repenting. And how tender his affections were towards his friends and followers, fully appears from his last discourses wherewith he took his leave of his disciples, recorded in the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of *St John*, a portion of Scripture which we can't too often read and consider, so full it is of excellent advice, and heavenly consolation. This we may call the *last sermon* of our dying Lord, which we ought to lay up in our minds, as the pledge of his love, and our own security. And when we feel any dejection of spirit, which the best of men sometimes labour under; how doth it revive our hearts, to hear him comforting his Disciples against their fears and sorrows, assuring them of his love and of God's favour, arming them with admirable instructions against the hour of temptation, and at last recommending them to God, in a most affectionate and fervent prayer, *chap. xvii.* the pattern of
his

his intercession for us in heaven; and particularly praying for *Peter*, that *his faith might not fail*; and when afterward thro' fear he had denied his Master, recalling him to a sense of his duty by a gracious look, and by this first great instance of patience and long-suffering toward a believer, instructing us all not to despair of mercy, tho' we fall into sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth, but speedily to recover ourselves out of that evil state by a sincere repentance. And we may justly say, that the *Church* was *built* upon St *Peter's repentance*, as well as upon the confession which he made of his *faith*. And when our Lord had in so an affectionate a manner perform'd all the tenderest offices of the kindest master, and the best friend, he absolutely resign'd himself to the will of his father, and became *obedient to the death, even the death of the cross*! And when he had thus finish'd his course, we find him commending his soul to

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God in that his last ejaculation,
*Father, into thy hands I commend my
spirit (s) !*

Thus our Saviour hath given us
an example how to live, and how to
die ; and if we follow this glorious
pattern which he hath set us, *neither
death nor life will be able to separate
us from him.*

Thus I have taken a brief view of
the most remarkable occurrences in
the Gospels ; a part of Scripture that
does particularly recommend itself to
our frequent reading and meditation,
because it is so full of comfort and
edification to all Christians, and with-
al so admirably fitted to the under-
standings and capacities of the mean-
est, as I have already observ'd, (t)
and will further appear if we consider
in the

II. Place, the *manner of writing,*
made use of by the Evangelists, their
plainness of speech, and the other signal

(s) Luke xxiii. 46.

(t) Chap. iii.

marks of integrity, which are so conspicuous in all the parts of the evangelical history.

Our Saviour spoke with the plainness and majesty of a law-giver, not with the niceness or subtilty of a philosopher. He made it a greater part of his business *to preach the Gospel to the poor*, and in condescension to the meanest capacities used great plainness of speech. Accordingly the Evangelists related his discourses with the same plainness and simplicity of expression with which he spake to them, and recommended themselves and their writings by an unaffected manifestation of the truth, and not by the enticing words of art and sophistry. They recorded their own weaknesses and mistakes, as hath been already observ'd (u), and we can't discover in their writings the least bias of passion or private interest, which is so visible in all human

(u) Chap. ii.

composures.

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composures. The several Evangelists sometimes relate the same story with different circumstances ; an undoubted argument of their sincerity, and a certain sign that the history which they relate is not a fable of their own contrivance. Men that have combined together to put a cheat upon the world, are naturally very apprehensive of being discover'd, and to make all sure, take the utmost care that their evidence may agree in every point and title ; but honest men need not be so scrupulous : And this unaccuracy of the Evangelists, if any one pleases so to style it, may justly be ascrib'd to a particular direction of providence, because it shews that they were well assur'd, that their cause did not stand in need of the borrow'd helps of exact method, studied expressions, and laboured periods.

I shall conclude this chapter with that weighty exhortation the Apostle

postle (x), *Take heed that ye despise not him that speaks to you in the holy Gospels, for if they escape not, who despised him that spake on earth, how shall we escape, if we turn away from him that speaks to us from Heaven?* Nay, that came down from Heaven on purpose that he might speak unto us, and converse with us, and become both our teacher and our example.

(x) Heb. xii. 25.



C H A P. IX.

*The principal matters to be observ'd
in reading the Acts and Epistles
of the Apostles.*

OUR Saviour confin'd his preach-
to *the lost sheep of the house of
Israel* (a): But he chose his Apo-
stles to be with him whilst he con-
tinued in the world, to be trained
up under his discipline, and be wit-
nesses of his life and doctrine, his
death and resurrection. And when
he was just departing out of the
world, he commanded them to te-
stify what they had seen and heard,
not only in *Judea* and the countries
adjacent, but even to *the uttermost
parts of the earth* (b).

(a) Matth. xv. 24.

(b) Acts i. 8.

A strange and improbable design, as it appears at first sight! that a few men of obscure birth and mean education, that had neither learning nor interest, should undertake to propagate a new religion in the world, that was in many points contrary to mens carnal inclinations and worldly interests; and persuade them to forsake the religion of their forefathers, which was not only deeply rooted in their minds, by custom and education, but also had all the external advantages of strength and interest which worldly power and policy could give it. No persons in their senses would have undertook such a design as this, unless they had been fully assur'd of a divine power that should assist them. And we can give no rational account of the wonderful success which accompanied their preaching, but that *he who was in them was greater than he that was in the world. God chose the weak things of the world, to confound the things that*

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that are mighty, that no flesh might glory in his presence (c); and the planting of the Gospel might appear to be the work of God, and not of man. And when the Christian Religion prevail'd over all the strength and policy of the world, it was a demonstration that it came from God, because men could not overthrow it; and though they opposed it with their united force, yet they could not prevail against it, because God was with it. Therefore the Apostle deservedly reckons Christ being preached among the Gentiles, and believed on in the world, as part of the great mystery of godliness, and accounts it as wonderful a work as God's being manifest in the flesh, and justified in the spirit (d).

Now the doctrine which the Apostles preach'd to the persons who liv'd in their own time, they afterward by God's direction committed

(c) 1 Cor. i. 29.

(d) 1 Tim. iii. 16.

to writing, for the perpetual use of the Church in all ages. 'Twas necessary that the Apostles should provide for the instruction of after-times as well as their own (e); as they were the founders of the universal Church, which however enlarged by the accession of believers, or increased in extent by the continuance of time, must still be supported by the same foundation, *i. e.* the doctrine which the Apostles at first delivered; and which succeeding times could never have been certainly inform'd of, unless it had been committed to writing, the only safe and sure way of conveying things down to posterity. This doctrine is contain'd in the *Acts of the Apostles*, written by St *Luke*, and in the *Epistles* di-

(e) Διὰ τῆς τῶν Ἐπιστολῶν ἀρετῆς (Παῦλ.)
 ἡ τὰς τότε μόνον πιστὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἐξ ἐκείνης
 μέχει τῆς σήμερον γενομένης, καὶ τὰς μέλλον-
 τας δὲ ἔσεσθαι μέχει τῆς ἐσχάτης τῆς χειρὸς
 παρυσίας, ὠφέλησε τε καὶ ὠφελησεί. καὶ ἡ παύ-
 σελαι τῶτο ποιῶν ἕως ἂν τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων δια-
 μένη γένῃ. *Chrysost.* l. 4. de sacerdotio pro-
 pe fin.

rected

rected to the several Churches, in order to confirm and build them up in that holy faith, wherein they had been instructed.

The usefulness of these holy writings I come now to consider : And shall first make some general observations concerning them ; and then proceed to consider some of the principal matters to be regarded in our reading of them.

I. And first, I shall observe the agreement that is between those apostolical writings and the Gospel history, and how they mutually confirm and support each other.

The *Acts* relate several passages which confirm the truth of the Gospels, *viz.* the testimony which the Apostles gave to the life, doctrine, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, exactly agreeing with that account of each particular which we find in the Gospels; how they all of them join'd in
giving

giving this testimony (*f*) and persisted in it, notwithstanding all the evils which either threatned them (*g*), or were actually inflicted upon them (*h*).

2. In the same book we find several promises which our Saviour made to his Disciples punctually perform'd : As that he would *endue them with power from on high, and enable them to be his witnesses among all nations* (*i*) : That they should work great and extraordinary miracles in his name (*k*) : That they should suffer many hardships for his sake, but that he would support them under their sufferings, and give them such wisdom, and presence of mind as should baffle and confound all their opposers (*l*).

3. The Epistles of the Apostles do likewise abundantly confirm all

(*f*) Acts ii. 32.

(*g*) Chap. iv. 21.

(*h*) Chap. v. 41.

(*i*) Luke xxiv. 47, 49.

(*k*) Mark xvi. 17, &c. John xiv. 12.

(*l*) Matth. x. 17, &c. Luke xxi. 12, &c.

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the considerable passages related in the Gospels and the Acts.

The particulars of our Saviour's life and death, are often referr'd to in them, as grounded upon the undoubted testimony of eye-witnesses, and being the foundation of the Christian Religion.

The speedy propagation of the Christian faith, recorded in the Acts, is confirm'd beyond all contradiction, by innumerable passages in the Epistles, written to the Churches already planted : And that within the compass of the same age wherein Christ lived, when it had been the easiest thing in the world to have disproved the matters of fact which the Apostles attested concerning him, if they had not been true.

The miraculous gifts which the Apostles were indued with, and particularly the gift of tongues, are often appeal'd to in the same writings, as an undeniable evidence of the divine mission of the Apostles. Particularly
in

in the *first Epistle to the Corinthians* we may observe such an evident proof that the gift of tongues was notoriously communicated to believers, as I think should be sufficient to satisfy any unprejudic'd man. We find in the 12th and 14th chapters of that Epistle, the Apostie with great exactness distinguishes the several gifts of the Spirit (*m*), and gives directions for the orderly use and exercise of those gifts, particularly that of tongues (*n*), and corrects several abuses which were crept into the Church by a vain and unseasonable ostentation of that gift (*o*). Now can any one suppose that a person in his right senses would make an elaborate discourse upon this argument, if there had been no such thing as the gift of tongues in the Church at that time? This would be to suppose the most absurd thing in the world, rather than believe the Scripture to be true.

(*m*) 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9, 10. (*n*) Chap. xiv. 26, &c.

(*o*) Ibid. v. 6, &c.

I pro-

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I proceed now to consider the principal matters to be observ'd in our reading this part of the *New Testament* writings. And those are of three sorts.

1. *The doctrine contain'd in them; as being an authentic commentary upon the Gospels, or a fuller explication of sundry articles of the Christian faith, which our Saviour had but sparingly spoke of in his own discourses.*

2. *The exact idea these writings give us of the faith and manners of the first Christians: a signal evidence of the divine power which accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel, and a noble pattern for us to imitate.*

3. *The graces and virtues which appear so conspicuously in the apostolical writings, and prove the authors of them to be men sent from God.*

1. *In respect of the doctrine therein contained.* The doctrine which the Apostles taught their converts was the same in substance which Christ taught them, according to the tenor
of

of Christ's commission to them, *Matth.* xxviii. 20. Yet the apostolical writings have this particular advantage, that they are a *divine and infallible commentary*, or an *authentic explication* of Christ's words in the Gospels, wherein the fundamentals of Christianity are admirably illustrated, and the mysterious parts of our holy faith more fully open'd and explain'd, than they were by Christ himself. (p) He told his disciples whilst he was upon earth, (q) that *he had many things to say unto them, but they could not bear them at the present*, and therefore he referred them for fuller instructions in these matters, to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, which he promised to send down upon them after his departure.

(p) Ὅσπερ χειρὸς ἐργάσατο μείζονα διὰ τῶν Μαθητῶν, ἢ δι' αὐτῆς, ἕτοι καὶ ἐφ' ἐγγύατο.
Chrysost. Hom. ult. in Ep. ad Rom.

(q) John xvi. 12.

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To instance in some particulars of this kind.

1. There were some things which our Saviour did not fully and clearly explain to his disciples, but accommodated his expressions to those prejudices in which they had been bred up; as when he discourses concerning the nature and glories of his kingdom.

2. In other cases, tho' Christ spoke clearly and plainly, yet his Disciples did not apprehend his meaning at all, as namely, when he discourses concerning his own death and resurrection, and the redemption of the world, which was to be accomplish'd by that means.

3. Lastly, when our Saviour discourses concerning the calling of the *Gentiles*, he doth not express the thing in plain words, but only hints it in some general expressions, as when he says (r), *Many shall come*

(r) Matth. viii. 11.

from

from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham in the kingdom of heaven: or else obscurely intimates it in parables, particularly those of the prodigal Son (s), and of the householder that went out at the latter end of the day to hire labourers into his vineyard (t).

In all which cases, what the Apostles did not perfectly understand, they could not be supposed exactly to remember; but as the Holy Spirit brought our Saviour's words more distinctly to *their remembrance*, according to Christ's promise (u), so by the direction of the same Spirit, they explain'd these great and important truths more fully than our Saviour did whilst he was upon earth; as will appear upon a brief view of what they say upon each of these heads.

(s) Luke xv. 11.

(t) Matth. xx. 1.

(u) John xiv. 26.

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To begin with the first, *viz.* *Our Saviour's discourses concerning the nature of his own kingdom.*

The *Jews* all along expected that the kingdom of Christ should *come with observation* (x), *i. e.* with the same pomp and splendor which accompanies an earthly monarchy, thereby to draw the eyes of the world after it. This is still the great stumbling-block of the *Jews*; and the most considerable objection they have against our *Messias* is, that *his kingdom is not of this world.* This opinion was so deeply rooted in the minds of the Apostles, that our Saviour did not think it proper to tear it up all at once, but rather to remove it by gentle and easy degrees. Accordingly, in compliance with their prejudices, we find him describing his kingdom, and the pre-eminence they were to enjoy in it, *by eating and drinking at his table,*

(x) Luke xvii. 20.

and

and sitting on thrones, and judging the twelve tribes of Israel (y).

But after the Holy Ghost had given the Apostles clear and distinct apprehensions of the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, and wherein the happiness of it did consist, we find what noble representations they give us of the glories which are laid up for us in heaven, and what powerful arguments they take from hence to persuade us to set our minds upon the things of this world. They describe the happiness of the world to come, by an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away (z)*: by a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (a), where God shall be all in all (b): he shall reign with an absolute dominion, and it shall be our honour and happiness that God is exalted. They exhort us not to set our minds upon

(y) Luke xxii. 30. Matth. xix. 28. (z) 1 Pet. i. 4. (a) 2 Pet. iii. 12. (b) 1 Cor. xv. 28.

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the things that are seen and are temporal; but on those which are not seen, and are eternal (c) : and by the continual exercise of faith and patience, of mortification and contempt of this world, to make ourselves meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (d).

The same prejudice concerning the temporal glories of Christ's kingdom, made his disciples not understand the meaning of those several discourses of his concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection (e). The early conquests and triumphs of their master was what they dream'd of, and could not apprehend how he should become glorious thro' sufferings. Whereupon the doctrine of the cross, and the saving effects of it not being understood by the Apostles (f), till our Saviour had open'd their understandings by his

(c) 2 Cor. iv. 18. (d) Col. i. 12. (e) See Mark ix. 10. Luke ix. 45. xviii. 34. (f) See Matth. xvi. 22.

discourses upon this subject after his resurrection, we can't expect so perfect an explication of that great and fundamental article of Christianity in the Gospels, as in the Epistles. In which, *Christ's dying for our sins, and and rising again for our justification*, is every where insisted upon as the foundation of all our hopes : and the doctrine of the cross is there spoken of as a truth of such importance, that St *Paul* (g), in comparison of it, despises all other sort of knowledge, whether divine or humane. From hence it is that the Apostles deduce those powerful motives to obedience, which are taken from the love, humility and condescension of our Lord, and the right which he has to our service, having purchased us with the price of his blood (h). From hence they derive those great obligations which lie upon Christians to exercise

(g) 1 Cor. ii. 2. (h) See 1 Cor. vi. 20. 2 Cor. v. 15. 1 Gal. ii. 20. Tit. ii. 14. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

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the duties of mortification and self-denial ; of *crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts* (i) : of patience under afflictions, and rejoicing in tribulations (k) : of being dead to this world, and *seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God* (l). Thus as our Saviour *spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over his enemies by the cross* (m), so the good Christian overcomes the world by being crucified to it, and *becomes more than conqueror thro' Christ that loved him*.

The third instance which I gave of doctrines that may more fully be learn'd from the Epistles and other writings of the Apostles, than from the words of Christ recorded in the Gospels, *is the calling of the Gentiles*

- (i) Gal. v. 24. vi. 14. Rom. vi. 6. 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2. (k) Phil. iii. 10. 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. 1 Pet. ii. 19, &c. iv. 13. (l) Coloss. iii. 1, &c. (m) Chap. ii. 15.

to make one and the same Church with the Jews.

The many prophecies of the *Old Testament* which foretel the calling of the *Gentiles*, were sufficient to convince the *Jews* that in the times of the *Messias*, God would reveal the knowledge of himself, and his will to the world more fully than ever he had done before. But the extraordinary value which they had for themselves, and the privileges which they fancied were peculiar to their own nation, made them unwilling to believe that the *Gentiles* should ever be *fellow heirs* with the *Jews*, of the same body or Church with them, and *partakers* of the same promises in *Christ* by the *Gospel* (n). This *St Peter* himself could hardly be persuaded to believe, till he was convinced by a particular vision vouchsafed to him for that purpose (o). And *St Paul* tells us that this was a

(n) Ephs. iii. 6.

(o) Acts x. 28.

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mystery which was but newly revealed to the Apostles by the Spirit (p): and therefore not fully discover'd by by Christ before.

And here 'tis proper to observe to what excellent purposes the Apostles improve this new Revelation which was vouchsafed to them: how they take occasion from hence in their writings to magnify the riches of God's grace, in making his ways known upon earth, and bringing men out of darkness into his marvellous light: how they set forth the divine power which accompanied the preaching of the Apostles, whereby they that were sometimes foolish, disobedient, and serving divers lusts and pleasures (q) were washed, were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (r), and learned to put off the old man which was corrupt according to the deceitful lusts: and to be renewed in the spirit of their mind (s). Lastly,

(p) Eph. iii. 5. (q) Tit. iii. 3. (r) 1 Cor. vi. 11. (s) Eph. iv. 24.

from

from hence they powerfully exhort us *Gentiles*, now we have the light to walk as children of the light (t), and to walk worthy of that holy calling wherewith we are called (u): always remembering that we were not redeemed from our vain conversation with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God (x).

I shall conclude my remarks concerning the doctrinal parts of the *Epistles*, with one general observation; viz. That altho' most of them were writ upon particular occasions, and with relation to the present exigencies of the Churches to which they are directed, yet you may find the Apostles take occasion from every hint that is offered to them, to explain the mysteries of the Gospel, to set forth the excellency of it, to persuade men to live up to the height of it's precepts. They descend

(t) Eph. v. 8.

(u) Chap. iv. 1.

(x) 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

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to give particular directions for discharging the duties relating to all states and conditions of life; those of princes and subjects (*y*); of pastors and people (*z*), of husbands and wives (*a*), of parents and children (*b*), of masters and servants (*c*). This is a convincing argument that the holy Spirit which influenced their pens, had not only an eye to the particular exigencies of the Christians, who liv'd in those times, but likewise directed the holy writers to enlarge themselves upon such points of doctrine and practice, which were of universal concern, and would be for the benefit of the faithful in all succeeding generations. I proceed to consider,

(*y*) Rom. xiii. 1 Pet. ii. 13, &c. (*z*) *In the Epist. to Tim. and Titus. See also 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. and Heb. xiii. 7, 17.*

(*a*) Eph. v. 22, &c. Coloss. iii. 18, &c. 1 Pet. iii. 1, &c. (*b*) Eph. vi. 1, &c. Coloss. iii. 20, 21. (*c*) Eph. vi. 5, &c. Col. iii. 22, &c. Tit. ii. 9. 1 Pet. ii. 18.

II. *The*

II. *The exact idea which these apostolical writings give us of the faith and manners of the first Christians:*

A signal evidence of the divine power which accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel, and a noble pattern for us to imitate.

Amidst those numerous sects which divide the Christian Church, the sober men of all parties seem to agree in this, that the true model and pattern of the Christian Religion, with respect to faith and manners, is to be taken from the doctrine and practice of the apostolical Church. And without meddling at present with doctrinal points, (as being more subject to dispute and controversy) if we take a view of the manners and behaviour of the primitive Christians, as they are describ'd in the *Acts* and the *Epistles*; we may draw such a portraiture of that first and purest Church, as will at once ravish us with delight and admiration at the sight of it's beauties and
perfections,

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perfections, and strike us with shame and confusion, when we find how much we are degenerated from the virtues of our fore-fathers. It is therefore very proper frequently to represent to ourselves and others, the *pattern and fashion of this house of God*, as it is delineated by the *master-builders* thereof, *that we may all be ashamed of what we have done, and of our iniquities and deviations from it* (d).

We can't look upon those writings but we shall every where discover with what joy and gladness, with what reverence and attention, the first converts receiv'd the Gospel, *not as the word of men, but as it was indeed the word of God* (e), *and the power of God unto salvation*: How highly they esteem'd the ministers and preachers of this word, and *receiv'd them as messengers, or angels of God, and even as Christ*

(d) Ezek. xliii. 10, 11.

(e) 1 Thes. ii. 13.

Jesus

Jefus (*f*), in whose name they spake. From the same holy writings we may learn, how much their thoughts were fix'd upon heavenly things; in the midst of their employments meditating upon God's word, and celebrating his praises (*g*): being careful to perform their private Devotions, at those solemn hours of Prayer (*h*), which pious men in former times (*i*) had set apart for that purpose: And laying hold of all opportunities of joining in the public worship of God, *in season and out of season*, early in the morning (*k*), and late at night (*l*), according as they could assemble with the greatest security: And when any public calamity threatned them, imploring the aid of Heaven without ceasing, and

(*f*) Galat. iv. 14. (*g*) Eph. v. 19. Colos. iii. 16. James v. 13. (*h*) See Acts ii. 15. iii. 1. x. 9. xvi. 25. 1 Thes. v. 19. (*i*) See Psalm lv. 17. Dan. vi. 10. (*k*) See Acts xii. 12. & Plin. Epist. l. 10. Ep. 97. Tertull. Apolog. cap. 39. (*l*) Acts xx. 7.

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continuing instant in Prayers and Sup-
plications night and day (m).

The same Scriptures do abundantly declare how ready the first Christians were, to do or suffer any thing that might promote the glory of God, and testify the sincerity of their obedience to his laws; doing good with an unwearied diligence (*n*), and enduring evil, not only patiently, but joyfully (*o*). What unfeigned love they shewed toward all their brethren (*p*), and with what a fervent charity, *even beyond their power*, they relieved the necessities of those that were in want (*q*). How sober and regular they were in their private deportment (*r*), using the things of the world as those that look'd upon them-

- (*m*) Chap. xii. 5. (*n*) See Phil. i. 3, &c.
 Colos. i. 3, &c. 1 Thes. i. 3. 2 Thes. i. 3.
 (*o*) Ibid. v. 4. Heb. x. 34. Acts xiii. 52.
 (*p*) Eph. i. 15. 1 Thes. iv. 10. Heb. xiii. 1.
 1 Pet. i. 22. (*q*) Acts xi. 29. Rom. xv. 26.
 1 Cor. xvi. 1. 2 Cor. viii. 2, 3. Philem. ver. 7.
 3 John vi.
 (*r*) 1 Thes. iv. 1. 1 Pet. iv. 4.

selves

selves to be strangers here, and denizens of the heavenly city (s).

The apostolical writings afford us two undeniable proofs of the unblameable lives of the first Christians. The first is, that the Apostles there glory in the lives of their Disciples, as convincing argument of the divine grace which accompanied their conversion (t), an argument we are forced now to decline: And in the next place, that whosoever among them was guilty of any scandalous behaviour, had a mark presently set upon him (u); his acquaintance first avoided his conversation, and then the Church turn'd him out of their Communion, as a person unworthy of that holy society (x). They did

(s) Ἡμῶν πολίτευμα ἐν ἑσχατοῖς ὑπάρχει,
Phil. iii. 20.

(t) 1 Cor. vi. 11. Phil. ii. 15, 16. 1 Thes. ii. 19, 20. 2 Thes. i. 4. Colos. i. vi. 1 John ii. 14.

(u) *Idem de sua ætate testantur, Justin. M. Apol. II. rectius I. n. 17. & 20. Edit. Oxon. & Lacæunt. Divin. Instit. b. 3. c. 25. Tertull. Apolog. cap. 3.*

(x) 1 Cor. v. 11, 13. 2 Thes. iii. 6, 14.

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not prostitute Church-censures to base and secular ends, which has made them lose all their authority in these latter ages, but they inflicted them *for edification and not for destruction* (y), with a hearty concern for the honour of God and the souls of men, with all the signs of mourning and sorrow (z), for him who had incurred them, as one who by his sins had provok'd God, had endanger'd his own salvation, and had dishonour'd that *worthy name whereby he was called*. So offensive was a single blemish in that Church, which endeavoured to keep itself without spot or wrinkle, and fit to be the spouse of the immaculate Lamb.

This short view of the state of the apostolical Church, is of itself sufficient to satisfy any considering man of the truth of that holy religion, which then first appeared in the

(y) 2 Cor. xiii. 10. (z) See 1 Cor. v. 2. 2 Cor. vii. 11, 12, 21.

world. For we find the Apostles often appealing to the experience of their converts, for the truth of what they say concerning the divine power, which accompanied their preaching: And it appears that those first Christians, who could with the greatest ease trace their religion to it's original, were most fully convinc'd of the truth of it, lived up to the height of it's principles, and sealed it with their death and sufferings.

III. A third thing very observable in the apostolical writings, is, *The graces and virtues of the authors of them, which appear there so conspicuously, and prove the persons endued with such extraordinary qualities, to be men sent from God: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (a), as our Saviour observes.* Speech is one of the surest indications of mens inward dispositions. Indeed, hypocrites do often shew great

(a) Matth. xii. 34.

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zeal for religion, and pretend to all the heights and raptures of an inflamed devotion : But they can't act a part so cunningly, but that the vizard will at some time or other drop off unawares, and they will discover a great deal of spiritual pride, or secular ambition, lurking under the specious shew of religion and godliness. But the writings of the Apostles have all the air of an unaffected piety, and untainted integrity that can be imagin'd ; *As of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God, speak they in Christ (b)* ; they speak as those that believed themselves, and were thoroughly convinced of the truth and great importance of the things they deliver.

We can't look into the history of their *Acts* or their *Epistles*, but we may every where observe remarkable instances of their constancy and patience in suffering for the

(b) 2 Cor. ii. 17.

testimony

testimony of the Gospel ; of their unwearied labours in publishing it ; of their hearty concern for the good success of their ministry ; of their renouncing all self-interest and worldly considerations, and seeking nothing but the honour of God, and the good of mens souls. There is set before our eyes their *work of faith, their labour of love, their patience of hope*, their unaffected contempt of the world, their zeal for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, and in general how they make it their chief aim to approve themselves to God, *To finish their course with joy, and faithfully to discharge the ministry they had receiv'd from the Lord Jesus*. These characters carry their own evidence along with them, and are of far greater force than all the *enticing words of man's wisdom*. They are a demonstration of that holy Spirit which influenc'd the speakers, and must needs sink deep

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deep into the minds of all attentive hearers.

But it may not be amiss to take a more particular view of the virtues and graces which appear so eminently in the writings of the Apostles.

And *first* we will consider the evident marks we find there of *their sincere piety toward God.*

Nothing but a hearty sense of their duty to God, and a desire to approve themselves to him, could have engag'd them in so difficult an undertaking as that of publishing the Gospel, and standing up in the defence and confirmation of it, *when it was every where spoken against.* A great part of the world *became their enemies, because they told them that truth* which they had no mind to hear, and had not so much civility as to thank them for their good intentions, and to take the good advice, which they offer'd, kindly at their hands. Our Saviour fore-warn'd them

them, that *in the world they must expect tribulation* (c), and the event justify'd the truth of the prediction. So that they could have no reasonable inducement to undertake a work attended with so much trouble and difficulty, but only a hearty zeal for the glory of God, *whose they were* (d), and *whom they serv'd in the Gospel of his Son* (e). As we were allow'd of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, saith St. Paul, *so we speak not as pleasing men, but God, who searcheth the hearts* (f).

Secondly, the Apostles charity to the souls of men, and their hearty concern for their salvation, does in the next place offer itself to our consideration.

They had no greater joy than to hear that their children in Christ walked in the truth, as St John testifies (g). Now we live, saith St Paul to the

(c) John xvi. 33. (d) Acts xxvii. 23. (e) Rom. i. 9. (f) 1 Thes. ii. 4. (g) 3 John iv.

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Theſſalonians, if we ſtand faſt in the Lord (b). In like manner, nothing affected them with ſo much grief and ſadneſs, as when they underſtood that any of their converts had brought a ſcandal upon his holy profeſſion by his evil behaviour. Who is weak, ſaith the Apoſtle, and I am not weak, who is offended, and I burn not (i)? That which comes upon me daily, adds he in the ſame place, is the care of all the Churches, and my concern for their ſpiritual welfare. This made him ſo diligent to avoid giving any occaſion of offence, leſt the miniſtry itſelf ſhould be blamed for his ſake (k): This made him preach the Goſpel freely (l), and wave that right which he had of demanding maintenance from thoſe to whom he preach'd it, and choſe to ſuffer any hardſhips, rather than hinder the Goſpel of Chriſt, or ſtop the progreſs

(b) 1 Theſ. iii. 8.
(i) 2 Cor. xi. 28, 29.
Cor. xi. 7.

See chap. ii. 19, 20.
(k) 2 Cor. vi. 3. (l) 2

of

of it (*m*): This made him not only labour without ceasing in the work of the Gospel, *that by all means he might save some*; but likewise rejoice in his sufferings for the sake of it, when he found that they were serviceable to so noble an end, as that of the salvation of men. *I endure all things*, saith he, *for the Elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory* (*n*). And no wonder that his charity was so fervent toward his Converts, *his children in Christ*, as he often styles them (*o*), when he could find in his heart to be *accursed from Christ* (*p*) for the sake of the Jews his fleshly brethren. Such an expression of charity as we scarce dare venture to interpret, and as much exceeds our comprehension as it is above our imitation! If we would

(*m*) 1 Cor. ix. 12, 13, 14. See 1 Thes. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9. (*n*) 2 Tim. ii. 9. (*o*) 1 Cor. iv. 15. Gal. iv. 19. Philem. ver. 10. (*p*) Rom. ix. 3.

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give an exact idea of an evangelical pastor, and the concern he ought to have for the souls committed to his charge, we can't do it in more significant words than those of St Paul in the *second Epistle* to the *Corinthians*, chap. vi. from the beginning to the eleventh verse: And in the *first Epistle* to the *Thessalonians*, chap. ii. from verse 1, to 14, both which places contain a description of his own and the rest of the Apostles behaviour in that weighty office, and are a pattern for all that shall succeed them in that employment.

Thirdly, Let us take a short view of the Apostles *sincere and unaffected contempt of the world*, as it appears every where in their writings.

Indeed they met with so much hard usage in the discharge of their office, as would have discourag'd any men that had the least regard for the honours, the profits, or the pleasures of the world: But their
minds

minds were above such low considerations. Hear St Paul's attestation for himself and his brethren (q): *Our exhortations was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness: nor of men sought we glory. When the men of Lycaonia would have offer'd sacrifice to him and Barnabas, we find them renting their cloaths with the greatest indignation, and crying out (r), Sirs! Why do ye these things? We are men of like passions and infirmities with yourselves.*

'Tis confessed, that there have been those who have sacrific'd their ease, interest, and even life itself, to vain glory: But if we suppose this to have been the ruling principle in the minds of the Apostles, 'twas certainly the most unaccountable vanity that ever was heard of, and such as

(q) 1 Thes. ii. 3, 5, 6. (r) Acts xiv. 15.

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acted most in contradiction to itself. For they that were supposed to be govern'd by it, voluntarily chose poverty, reproach and sufferings, things which naturally bring contempt upon men in the eyes of the world, (and which none, if in their senses, can make matter of choice, but upon a principle of conscience) and at the same time disclaimed all worth and merit in themselves, and took all occasions to magnify the grace of God bestowed upon such great sinners as they profess themselves to be.

The chief design of all their writings is to exalt God, and to humble man: They often express their desire, that *in all things God may be glorified*, from whom they acknowledge *every good and perfect gift to proceed*, and to whom they judge it most fit, that all honour and praise should be return'd.

Lastly, I shall briefly consider *that constancy and patience in suffering for the truth's sake*, of which there are
so

the HOLY SCRIPTURES. 245

so many eminent instances in the writings of the Apostles.

Not to mention any more particulars, which every one's reading may suggest to him, let us hear the catalogue which St Paul gives us of the persecutions he endured (s); *In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes, save one: Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned: Thrice I suffered shipwrack, and a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

(s) 2 Cor. xi. 23, &c.

M 3

Nothing

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Nothing could have supported men under such continual hardships and dangers, but a good cause and a good conscience ; and these two comforts made them endure afflictions not only patiently, but joyfully. And there can't be a more convincing argument, either of mens sincerity, or of the divine assistance attending them, than to see persons of a cool reason and settled judgment, triumph over the fears of death, and lay down their lives in testimony unto the truth.

Thus I have briefly survey'd those eminent characters of piety and virtue, which so signally appear in the writings of the Apostles, and are both an evident proof of that divine spirit which influenc'd their pens, and a glorious pattern for us to imitate. The instances I have pitch'd upon, are chiefly taken out of the Epistles of St *Paul*. But because it may be pretended that he had the assistance of human learning, where-
by

by his mind was enlarg'd and improv'd, we will take a short view of the writings of the other Apostles, who can't be said to have had the advantages of a learned education. And here 'tis easy to observe what an affectionate strain of piety runs thro' the Epistles of St *Peter*, how much edification and instruction is convey'd to us in the humble plainness of St *James*. But that which more especially offers itself to our admiration, is that noble simplicity of style and expression, which is so remarkable in the writings of St *John*. With what a native grandeur and majesty does he set forth the most elevated thoughts and sublimest mysteries, in plain and inartificial words (t) ? God, who distributes his graces and gifts severally as he pleases, seems to have given to St *John* a peculiar insight into the mysteries of the divine love. He was Christ's be-

(t) See the beginning of his Gospel, and first Epistle.

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loved Disciple ; he lay in his bosom ; from whence the love of God was transfused, and as it were breathed into his holy breast. His soul was touch'd with a deep and lively sense of it : His thoughts were big with that noble argument : He takes a particular delight in enlarging upon it, and he treats of it in a plain and inartificial style ; but yet with such a lofty eloquence, as is above the rules of human art, and can only be ascribed to the influence of that holy Spirit which gave him utterance.

Hos cum legimus, quem philosophum non contemnimus ? How dry and insipid are the witty sayings, and the studied periods of the philosophers, when compar'd with the *words of eternal life*, which these holy men spake ? The foundation of the religion which they preach, is solid, and not to be shaken ; they deliver nothing upon that subject, but what they have seen and heard ; (and matters of fact are not so easily attack'd by
by

by sophistry, as points of speculation). The arguments they propound to convince men, are firm and solid : The motives they use to persuade them, are weighty and powerful ; the best understandings must yield to the strength of them, and the meanest are capable of apprehending the force of them. And how must the heart of every attentive reader *burn within him*, when he sees these holy writers unfold the mysteries of the Gospel, and discover the whole counsel of God, not *in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth?* Who can forbear crying out, *From whence have these men such mighty gifts, and what wisdom is this that is given to them*, that unlearned and ignorant men should confound *the wisdom of the wise*, and baffle the subtilty of *the disputers of this world* (u)?

M 5

To

(u) Οὐδὲν ἀμαθέστερον Πέτρος, ἢ δὲν ἰδιωτικώτερον Πάυλος, ἀλλ' ὁμῶς ὁ ἰδιώτης ἕτος, καὶ ὁ ἀμά-

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To conclude this chapter: The virtues and graces which shine forth in every part of the apostolical writings, are alone a demonstration that the doctrine which they taught came from God, the fountain of truth and holiness: For certainly the Father of lies would never pitch upon such persons to carry on a contrivance of fraud and falshood. *Either make the tree good, and it's fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and it's fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by it's fruit (x):* As our Saviour unanswerably argues. And as St Paul reasons to the same purpose (y), *What fellowship can righteousness have with unrighteousness; or what Communion can light have with darkness? As little concord hath Christ with Belial.* And to say that Persons of such holi-

ὁ ἀμαθὴς ἐκεῖνος, μυρίως ἐνίκησαν φιλοσόφους, μυρίως ἐπεσόμισαν ῥήτορας. Chrysost. Præfat. in Ep. ad Rom.

(x) Matth. xii. 33.

(y) 2 Cor. vi. 14.

ness

ness and integrity as himself and his Apostles undeniably appear to have been, should either make or advance a lie, is to suppose one of these two things; either that God Almighty should be assisting in setting up the Devil's kingdom, or that Satan should join a helping hand to pull down his own.



C H A P. X.

The Advantages of Revelation above natural Light, or any System of the Law of Nature.

ALtho' we have just reason to prefer revelation before the bare light of nature, as may easily appear from what has been hitherto observ'd, and from a great deal more that might be added upon so copious a subject; yet I would not have any thing I have said misconstrued, as if it were spoken in derogation to natural religion. For I readily acknowledge, that all revelation supposes the truth of the principles of natural religion, and nothing is to be received as such, which evidently contradicts or overthrows those principles. So we are to look upon natural religion,
as

as the foundation, and revelation as the superstructure, that which adds the last and finishing stroke to the whole work.

And in my judgment this one consideration is sufficient to recommend the Scripture Revelation to every impartial reader, *viz.* That it not only supposes and builds upon the receiv'd principles of natural religion, concerning the being and providence of God, and the rewards and punishments of a future state, but likewise improves and enforces them, by placing them in a better light, and giving us greater evidence for them, than bare reason could suggest.

But alas! there are too many now-a-days that fancy God might have fav'd all this trouble, that revelation is a clog to religion instead of a help: They are of opinion that the law of nature is a sufficient rule for practice, and the intimations of another life; and the general notices of God's mercy, which reason offers to us,
are

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are as good a security for men's salvation as they need desire. Thus do ungrateful men requite God for his mercies; and this is all the return they think fit to make to him for those wonderful expressions of his love, *in sending his Son into the world, that we might live thro' him.*

To convince men of their folly, as well as their ingratitude, I shall briefly consider the *great advantages of revelation above the bare light of nature, or any system of natural religion*; and that upon three accounts.

1. *Because revelation explains our duty more fully and distinctly.*

2. *It enforces it by a more commanding authority.*

3. *The arguments it makes use of to that purpose, are more powerful and persuasive; and likewise more popular and better suited to common capacities.*

1. *Revelation explains our duty more fully and distinctly; i. e. it gives*

us a more distinct account of the several branches of our duty, and explains the due extent of each particular branch.

There is no question but the *laws of nature* are God's laws, who is the author of nature, and that their obligation is enforc'd upon men by natural sanctions; but yet the authority of each particular branch of them is not so clear and indisputable, as to be obvious to every capacity. And this uncertainty gives a pretence to men to judge for themselves, how far the obligation of natural duty extends, and no doubt but they will find out some favourable exception for their own darling lusts and vices. Upon this account, considering the great degeneracy of the world, the law of nature is too uncertain a rule for men to square their lives by. And indeed here lies that *mystery of iniquity*, which is now working under the pretence of *Deism*, or the maintaining natural religion in opposition
to

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to revelation ; viz. that men would
fain have a religion of their own
making, and be obliged by the laws
of God no farther than they like
them. So that there is absolute need
of a superior authority to over-rule the
cavilling wits of men (†,) and silence
those objections which mens lusts
will be industrious to raise against
such parts of their duty, which they
are unwilling to be restrain'd by.
And since eternal life is the free
gift of God, it must needs be the
most certain and satisfactory way for
God himself to declare his mind con-
cerning it, and the means whereby
it may be obtained.

“ If we be sent to read the laws
“ of nature in the tables of our own
“ hearts, saith our excellent bishop
“ *Taylor* (a) where some things are
“ disorder'd by passion, many more

(†) *Docemur non infinitis conversationumque plen-
nis disputationibus, sed autoritate Legum domitus
habere libidines, &c. Cic. de Orat. lib. 1.*

(a) *Duct. dubitant. l. 2, c. 2. Rule 7. n. 15, &c.*

“ are

“ are written by interest ; some are
“ indited by custom, and others
“ imprinted by education ; and a-
“ mongst several men these are the
“ authors of contrary inscriptions :
“ I say, if we have no better direc-
“ tor than this, whereby to square
“ our actions, we shall find ourselves
“ at a loss for the managing our be-
“ haviour in some of the weightiest
“ concerns of life.”

They that contend for the sufficiency of natural religion in opposition to revelation, or the written word of God, do not consider how much revelation hath contributed to clear up mens minds, and give them more distinct apprehensions of natural truths than the world had before. When a new discovery is made, we find most people flatter themselves so far, as to fancy that they could have it upon the very same thing, if they had but given their minds to it. The same prejudice lies in the case before us : The word of God hath
placed

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placed the principles of natural religion in their true light ; and when truth is once made plain and evident, it seems to be so easy and obvious, that every body fancies he knew as much before. But whoever considers how much the wisest and best philosophers were at a loss when they undertook to settle the great foundations of religion, and the principal branches of moral duty, may be easily convinc'd, that reason is but a blind guide in heavenly things, even to those who had made the best improvement of their natural talent.

I shall illustrate this matter by instancing in a few particulars.

The laws of *purity of heart*, of *loving our enemies*, and *overcoming evil with good* ; these and several other sublime duties are expressly commanded, and if I may so speak, *enacted* under the Gospel, But altho' most of them have been recommended as highly reasonable by the

the wisest heathens, yet they never could obtain the force and estimation of laws in the world, 'till the word of God re-inforc'd their obligation. Which one consideration is an undeniable proof that the corruption of human nature, and that degeneracy of manners which overspread the world before the times of the Gospel, had so far obscur'd the laws of nature, that there was need of teachers sent from God to instruct mankind in some parts of their duty, which might indeed have been discover'd by the light of reason, when it was in it's primitive perfection, but was in a great measure defac'd and obliterated by false principles and corrupt customs.

St *Paul* speaking of himself, whilst he was under the *Jewish* dispensation, tells us (b), that *he had not known lust to be a sin, unless the law had said, in exprefs words, thou shalt not covet.*

(b) Rom. vii. 7.

Without

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Without doubt, if he had narrowly consulted his own reason, that would have inform'd him, that we ought to obey God with the whole man and are bound to serve him with all the faculties both of our soul and body; and consequently that the irregular motions of the mind and thoughts were properly sins, as being breaches of that entire obedience which is due to God Almighty. But the Apostle's meaning is this, that his own natural corruption, join'd with the prejudices of his education, which was among the *Pharisees* (c), and confirm'd by the false notions of good and evil; which ran current in the world, had so far blinded his judgment, as to make him overlook so considerable a part of his duty, and nothing but the express commands of the law could have rectified his mistake in this matter.

(c) Τὸ μήκερσι προῖῃσαι ἔργον Βαλευσάμενον ἐκ ἔσι τιμωρίας ἄξιον, inquit *Josephus de Antiocho*, *Antiq.* l. 12. c. 13.

And

And if the law of *Moses* were so very instrumental in clearing up the due meaning and extent of the law of nature, certainly the laws of Christ are much more useful to that purpose; so that both together may justly be esteem'd the most perfect rule of life the world was ever yet acquainted with, and abundantly sufficient to render us *thoroughly furnish'd unto every good work.*

2. A second advantage which revelation hath above the unwritten law of nature, is, that *it speaks to us with a more commanding authority.*

The law of reason is indeed the voice of God within us. But yet it is but a *still small voice*, and such as is scarce heeded, but by a listening and attentive ear: nor is it of sufficient authority to reform mankind, considering with how much violence mens lusts and passions make head against it. Reason can exercise but a feeble authority over such rebellious subjects; it can only admonish them,

as

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as old *Eli* did his profligate Sons, and say to them, *why do ye such things?* *It is no good report that I hear of you:* and in both cases you shall find the reproof to be equally despised.

How faint are the reproofs of philosophers, when apply'd to the correction of obstinate offenders? to tell such persons that they act in contradiction to their reason, and below the dignity of their nature, is to make them accountable only to themselves, and they will easily find ways to discharge themselves from such feeble obligations. What sinner would not rather part with a fine notion, than deny himself the satisfaction of his lusts and pleasures? It is in vain to think to reform the world by any rules or precepts, but such as are enforc'd by the authority of God, that *supreme law-giver, who is able both to save and to destroy;* who hath the power of eternal life and death in his hands, and can
make

make the most daring finner tremble at his word.

(*) Accordingly our Saviour, who was *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, spake with authority*, as his hearers themselves confess'd (d). He deliver'd his precepts with the plainness and majesty of a lawgiver, not with the niceness and subtilty of a philosopher. His words were spirit, and they were life; they pierced into the soul and conscience, and laid open the innermost recesses of the heart; and in his discourses we find the majesty of a God, join'd with the gentleness of a friend, and the kindness of a brother.

In like manner if we consult the writings of the Apostles, with what authority do they teach? With what majesty do they command? With what severity do they rebuke? With

(*) *Quanta est prudentia hominis ad demonstrandum bonum, quanta auctoritas ad exigendum: tam illa falli facilis, quam ista contemni.* Tertull. Apol. c. 45. (d) Matth. vii. 29.

what

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what tender concern do they chastise? and with what weighty arguments do they persuade all Christians *to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.*

3. A third advantage which Revelation hath above the light of nature, consists in this, *that the arguments it makes use of to explain and enforce our duty, are more powerful and persuasive, and withal more popular, and better suited to common capacities.*

Our Saviour by taking our nature upon him, hath brought heaven down to us, and given us an assurance of it's promises in such a way as lies most level to our capacities, and works most forcibly upon our affections. The revealing the deep things of God in such a familiar and sensible manner as the Gospel does, carries a mighty and convincing evidence along with it, as St *John* sets forth in very emphatical expressions, at the beginning of his first *epistle*, *That which was from the beginning, which we*
have

have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life : for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.

If we will allow the principles of natural Religion all the force and evidence than can reasonably be desired, yet 'tis certain they are but of little use to persons of ordinary capacities *, who before the Revelation of the Gospel, were rather govern'd by the general instincts of natural conscience, and the authority of human laws and customs, than by the dictates of reason methodically deduc'd from clear and self-evident principles. The arguments which philosophers made use of to prove the immortality of the soul,

* See 1 Cor. i. 21.

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and a future state, were too nice and metaphysical to be apprehended by the vulgar understandings: And in order to make our perfect system of the laws of nature, men must attend to a long train of propositions, and be able to discover how one depends upon another.

Whereas in the holy Writings, instead of the uncertain dictates of a natural law, too often obscur'd by passion, and deprav'd by ill custom, we have the Will of God made known to us by his Son, *who was in the bosom of his Father*, intimately acquainted with all his counsels and purposes, and was pleas'd to come down from heaven, that he might shew us the way thither.

Instead of a general hope in God's mercies, (which those have little reason to rely upon, who despise the gracious offers of mercy tender'd to them by the Gospel) we have the pardon of our sins seal'd to us in the *blood of the new covenant*.

Instead

Instead of the obscure notices of a future state which reason offers, we have *life and immortality brought to light* by him, who is the *first-born from the dead* (e), and the *first fruits of them that sleep* (f): who died that he might destroy death, and free us from the dominion of it (g), and rose again to assure us of a life after death, and convince us that he had all power given him by God to bestow eternal life upon as many as were duly qualified for it (h). Our Saviour's visible ascension into heaven, was a lively and sensible instance of the rewards of another world: and it is matter of unspeakable comfort to all good Christians, to consider that he is gone into heaven, as our *forerunner, to prepare a place for us* (i) in those mansions of bliss, where he sits at God's right hand,

(e) Colos. i. 18.

(f) 1 Cor. xv. 20.

(g) Heb. ii. 14, 15. (h) John xvii. 2. Rom. xiv. 9. See 1 Cor. i. 21. (i) John xiv. 2 Heb. vi. 20.

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and makes intercession for us, as a *merciful and faithful high-priest*, who is both able and willing to *succour them that are tempted* (k), being touch'd with a compassionate sense of the weaknesses and frailties of human nature ; forasmuch *as in the days of his flesh* he himself was compassed about with the same infirmities, and was *in all points tempted like as we are* (l). All which considerations give us all imaginable assurance, that if we be not wanting to ourselves, *nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God, in Jesus Christ our Lord* (m).

The sacred writers never speak upon this subject, but in a triumphant style, and in a holy rapture of spiritual joy. *It is Christ that died*, saith St Paul (n), *yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand*

(k) Heb. ii. 17, 18. (l) Συμπάθουσόν ἡμῶν ὅτι τὴν ἀσθενεῖαν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοπαθῶς ἐπέεργασας. Clem. Alex. Pædagog. l. i. c. 8. (m) Rom. viii. 39. (n) Ibid. v. 33; &c.

of God, who makes intercession for us; and in all our adversities we shall be more than conquerors thro' him that loved us. When Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory, saith the same Apostle (o). To the same purpose are those admirable words of St Peter (p), whom not seeing ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. All which expressions so full of heavenly comfort are grounded upon the words of Christ himself, recorded by St John, because I live, ye shall live also (q): And again, at the beginning of the Revelation (r), where our Saviour appearing to St John supports and confirms his faith by those remarkable words, fear not, I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for ever-

(o) Colos. iii. 3.
xiv. 19.

(p) 1 Pet. i. 8.
(r) Chap. i. 17, 18.

(q) John

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more, and have the keys of hell and of
death.

What arguments can reason suggest to us of God's love toward mankind, which are comparable to those that are taken from this consideration, that *he has given us his Son (s)* ? The greatest gift that he was able to bestow, or we capable of receiving. Or what motives of obedience can be so forcible, as those which our Saviour's wonderful love and kindness, his amazing humility and condescension do furnish us with? when we reflect upon all that he has done and suffered for us, the obligations he hath laid upon us, and the right that he has to our service, as having purchased us with the price of his blood, What a powerful persuasive to obedience do those words of Christ contain in them, (t) *As my Father has loved*

(s) John iii. 16.

(t) John xv. 9, 10.

me, so have I loved you ; continue ye in my love : If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love. To reflect upon his love constraining us, gratitude obliging us, redemption engaging us to be his servants, does without question afford the strongest comforts against our fears, the greatest encouragement to the performance of our duty, and the most powerful preservative in the time of temptation, that can be desired.

And do these consolations of God seem small unto us ? or is their any secret method of obtaining heaven and happiness, which hath been luckily found out by the wits of the present age, as much inferior to their heathen predecessors in parts, as they are in ingenuity, after it had lain hid so long, and was undiscovered by all the eminent sages of the Gentile world ? Who miserably grop'd like the blind in their search after heavenly truth, and wish for a better guide than they found their own reason to

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be * to direct them in the untrod-
den paths of *pure and undefiled re-
ligion.*

So great is our natural blindness
in things relating to God, so great is
the averfeness of our wills to the
spiritual exercifes of Religion, that
all the helps both of nature and
grace are little enough to enable us
rightly to discharge our duty. †
Surely then God's mercy ought to
be thankfully acknowledg'd if he

(*) Utinam tam facile vera invenire possem,
quàm falsa convincere: *Cic. lib. 1. de Nat. Deor.*
There is a remarkable passage to the same Purpose
in *Plato's Phædro, cap. 23.* where speaking of the
enquiries of reason, concerning a future state, he
compares it's assistance to a boat or vessel that carries
us thro' the waves of this troublesome world, and
then adds this further reflexion, Εἰ μή τις δύναι-
το ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον ἐπὶ βέλαι-
οῖς ὁχήματι, ἢ ΘΕΙΟΤ ΛΟΓΟΤ ΤΙΝΟΣ
διάπορον εἶναι: unless a man can have a safer and
securer passage by the help of some stronger vessel,
or a Divine Revelation.

† Ecce adhuc tepescimus, auditis tot signis tuis
& doctrinis: quid fieret, si tantum lumen ad te se-
quendum non haberemus? *Kempis de imit. Christi,*
lib. 3. c. 18.

vouchsafes

vouchsafes us greater measures of strength and knowledge in order to this end, than the bare light and powers of nature can furnish us with : And it is a great argument both of his wisdom and goodness, that when *sin had so much abounded* in the world, *grace should much more abound.*



The CONCLUSION.

FOR a conclusion to the whole, I shall give the reader a general view of the reasons which prove the Scriptures to be the word of God ; all which join'd together will amount to the force of a demonstration.

In short then ; this book contains the most ancient records which are extant in the world, and informs us of the most remarkable occurrences that ever happen'd in it. It gives us an account of the beginning of the world, and affords us a prospect unto the end of it : nay, it leads us beyond it, and shews us the way to a better, *that new heaven, and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.*

These holy writings are the only means of coming to the knowledge
of

of God and of ourselves : they open an intercourse between heaven and earth, by the account they give us of the several transactions between God and man, especially the wonderful contrivance of man's redemption, and that gracious covenant made with him by God in Christ.

The *Bible* instructs us in such sublime truths, as are sufficient to raise admiration in the greatest understandings, and yet delivers them in such plainness and simplicity of expression, as is proper at once to inform, and to affect the meanest capacities. It lays down the most perfect rules and directions for all states and conditions of life, offers the most powerful motives to persuade men to practise accordingly.

Although the several books of it were written in distant ages, by persons of different qualities, conditions and interests, with great variety both of matter and manner of expression ; yet they all agree in teaching the

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fundamental truths, and promoting one and the same excellent design, *viz.* the glory of God, and the eternal happiness of men. The several parts of holy Writ do likewise corroborate each other's testimony; what one part promises, the other performs; what is prophesied in the *Old Testament*, we find accomplish'd in the *New*.

Thus far the holy Scriptures carry their own evidence along with them. But if we proceed to examine the external proofs of their divine authority, we shall find ourselves encompass'd with a whole *cloud of witnesses*.

These holy books have stood the test of the most inquisitive men in all ages, and bore up against the injuries of time itself, that devours all things. *Jews* and *Gentiles*, as well as *Christians*, have some way or other given testimony to their truth. The *heathens* never durst call in question the principal miracles therein related, which

which are the credentials of it's divine authority, and the *seal* which God hath set to this his *will* and *testament*. The oldest monuments of the heathen story, and all their ancient theology is derived from the Scriptures (*a*), tho' disguised with fables for the confirming their own superstitions and idolatries.

The *Jews* are zealous asserters of the authority of those very prophecies, which bear witness to that Christ whom they themselves refuse to acknowledge.

The Christians of all ages, a great and venerable body of men, have reverenc'd these books as the oracles of heaven. No body ever thoroughly search'd into them, and liv'd up to their directions, that ever found cause to repent them of their pains. On the contrary, the wisest and best

(*a*) See this fully prov'd by the learned Huetius, in his *Quæstiones Alnetanæ*, & *Demonstrat. Evangel.* Prop. 4. cap. 3. &c.

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of men, the more they have studied them, the more cause they have found to admire them, and still the greater comfort and satisfaction they have felt, by being devoutly exercised in them.

To conclude, if this book every way answers all the ends of Revelation, if it proposes suitable remedies to all the defects of human nature, if it setteth forth natural truths in their proper light, and discovers supernatural ones in a way worthy of the majesty of God, and most effectual to give satisfaction to the inquisitive minds of men: I say, if all these characters of a divine original, are to be found in these holy Writings, and in none other, then we must conclude, either that God never vouchsafed to make any extraordinary Revelation of his will to the world, or that the Scriptures which we embrace as the word of God, are that very Revelation.

I shall

I shall close up this argument with those excellent words of *Tatian*, in his oration to the *Greeks*, where he gives this account of his conversion to Christianity (b): *When I gave my mind, faith he, to a serious search after truth, it happen'd that I met with books written in a barbarous language, which, in respect to the doctrine contain'd in them, were much older than any writings of the Greeks, and contain'd divine truths in opposition to their errors and superstitions. And I was fully convinc'd of the truth of these writings, from the plainness and unaffectedness of the style, from the sincerity of the writers, from the intel-*

(b) Περινοῦντι μοι τὰ σπεδαῖα συνέβη γεγραφαῖς τισι ἐν ἰουχαῖν βαρβαρικάῃς, πρεσβυτέραις, μὲν ὡς πρὸς τὰ ἑλλήνων δόγματα, θειότεραις δὲ ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνων πλάνην. Καὶ μοι πεισθῆναι ταύταις συνέβη, διὰ τε τῶν λέξεων τὸ αἰσχυρὸν, καὶ τῶν εἰπόντων τὸ ἀνεπιτήδευτον, καὶ τῆς τῷ παντὸς ποιήσεως τὸ εὐκατάληπτον, καὶ τῶν μελλόντων τὸ προγνωσικόν, καὶ τῶν παρὰ γεγραμμένων τὸ ἐξαίσιον. καὶ τῶν ὅλων τὸ μοναρχικόν. *Tatian. Orat. ad Græcos, n. 46. Edit Oxon.*

ligible

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ligible account they give of the creation of the world, from the prophetic foresight they contain of things to come, from the excellency of their precepts, and because the whole design of those books is to instruct men in the knowledge and worship of the one true God.

With what reverence and attention, with what joy and gladness ought we then to receive these holy oracles? *not as the words of men, extremely liable to error and uncertainty, especially in matters of the greatest importance, but as they are in truth the words of God, the author of eternal happiness, and the only infallible guide and conductor thither.* When many withdrew themselves from our Saviour's instructions, St Peter thus express'd his steady adherence to his Master's words and doctrine (c), *Lord, faith he, to whom should we go? thou hast the words of*

(c) John vi. 68.

eternal

eternal life. And we may justly apply the same words to our own case, to confirm ourselves in our most holy faith ; and when we find it attack'd by the open assaults, or sly insinuations of our modern sceptics and infidels, this will be a sufficient reply to demand of them, *to whom shall we go ?* Shall we go to the men of reason ? But every man is forward to think his own reason as good as his neighbour's ; and reason never puts on so many different shapes, as when it undertakes to determine points of religion. Or shall we apply ourselves to the philosophers for greater certainty and better information ? *the holy Writings alone contain the words of eternal life ;* a truth which the wisest heathens never arriv'd to a certain knowledge of themselves, much less could they give their scholars any satisfaction or assurance in so important a point : *Learn of me, saith our Saviour (d), for I am meek and*

(d) Matth. xi. 29.

lowly

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lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Let us learn of him, the gentlest Master, and the kindest Instructor, who will have compassion on our ignorances, and help our infirmities, who will supply our imperfections with his own all-sufficient merits, and reward those good works which he himself has wrought in us, with an *eternal weight of glory*. His laws are the light of our eyes, and the joy of our hearts; his Gospel is a *guide of the blind, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, a light that shines in a dark place*, and clears up the doubts of our dim reason; and if we follow, it's conduct will lead thro' this vale of misery into those blessed regions, where there is light, and life, and happiness for evermore.

F I N I S.

*A short Prayer to be used by any one
alone in the Morning.*

I Adore thee, O Lord, the possessor of Heaven and Earth: Who surpassest all our thoughts, and dost us good beyond all our desires. There is all reason that should acknowledge thee continually; that I should worship and praise, and love, and obey thee, whilst I have my Being. I cannot but witness against myself, whensoever I neglect thee; much more when I oppose thy most high authority, by doing contrary to thy laws. For thy almighty goodness gave me my Being; and by that alone have I been maintained and liberally provided for: Yea, it hath born with me very patiently in my rebellion, and used extraordinary means to make us Friends, and ceases not its intreaties after many unkind denials; but continues to importune me

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me, till my heart consent to yield itself intirely to thee.

I cannot with-hold myself, O Lord, from thee, when I consider what thou art, and what thou hast been to me: Such a tender, gracious and compassionate father, as my greatest affections cannot find words to express. I must again surrender soul and body into thy hands, which have been so long, so lovingly stretched out towards me: Resolving to stay with thee, and never to depart away from thee.

For the more I know of thee, the more I find that I must needs love thee: And the more I love thee, the more I desire to love thee, and to resemble thee, and to be beloved of thee. O that I may feel the power of thy love so great in my heart, that it may govern the rest of my passions and affections: And nothing in the World may tempt me to displease thee, but every thing provoke me more to love thee, and delight in thee, and obey thee, *For whom is there*

A Prayer for the Evening. 285

there in Heaven that I can desire but thee, or on earth besides thee ! who art the blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords ; who only hast immortality ? And designest by thy Son Jesus to raise us, sinful Dust and Ashes, to a Kingdom, Glory, Honour and Immortality in the Heavens.

I most earnestly beseech thee that this sense of thee may accompany me wheresoever I go, and in whatsoever I do this day. That approving myself to thee in such a godly, sober, righteous, charitable and prudent behaviour, as may adorn the Gospel of my Lord and Master Christ Jesus ; I may have a greater assurance of thy good will towards me, and an undoubted hope of thy mercy in him to eternal life. In whose most blessed name and words I humbly recommend myself, my friends, and all thy servants to thy infinite charity ; saying, as he hath taught us,

Our Father, &c.

Another

Another for the Evening.

Blessing, Glory, Honour and Praise be again returned to thee, O father of mercy, from a most thankful heart; which offers up itself also in holy devotion to thee. Who art my sovereign Lord, my most loving Saviour, my deliverer and benefactor; the fountain of all the good things I enjoy at present, and the hope of my soul for ever and ever. Blessed be thy renewed kindness to me this day past: Both to myself and my relations, to my soul and my body, in my transactions with men, and in the liberty thou allowest me of addresses to myself. Pardon, good Lord, whatsoever hath escaped me in thought, word, or deed, contrary to my duty: And accept of those sincere intentions, and unfeigned purposes, which were, and I hope shall always be in my heart to study to approve myself to thee in all well-doing.

It is but just and reasonable that I should follow thy Will, and not my own: And in a grateful sense of what
I have

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I have receiv'd from thee, I ought to be moved to employ all the powers of my soul and Body for thee. But such is the Goodness of thy Will, that it is for my ease and pleasure, and greatest happiness to be absolutely led and governed by it. I am sensible, O Lord, how much I am indebted to thee for teaching me by Christ Jesus, and also strongly obliging me to exercise myself to all godliness, purity, righteousness, humility, goodness and truth. And accordingly I thank thee, above all things, for his holy instructions and example; for the hope thou hast given us by his blood, that thou wilt be so merciful to our sins, as not to deny us the power of thy Holy Spirit to enable us to follow him, and obey his commands; and for that exceeding great and precious promise which he hath given us of immortal life, to encourage us to follow him willingly and chearfully, even to the Death.

O that I may feel a lively and steadfast faith in his word, continually working

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working with great power in my heart; exciting me to an unwearied diligence, and zeal, and love, and patient continuance in my duty towards thee, and towards all Men: That so my hope in thee may grow and increase, and I may joyfully expect that hour which shall translate me hence to the eternal happiness of the other World. And during my stay here, I commend myself to thy good providence, which hath hitherto been so tender of me. I trust thee wholly with myself, and all belonging to me: And am willing in every thing to be disposed of, as thou seest good. This night I flee unto thy almighty protection; hoping thou wilt keep me safely, and whether I wake in this or the other life, I shall still be praising thee; whose mercy endureth for ever, *Amen*; for Christ Jesus his sake; by whom thou hast encouraged me to hope in thee, and taught me to call thee father; saying,

Our Father, &c.

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F I N I S.

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